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RED FLOWERS

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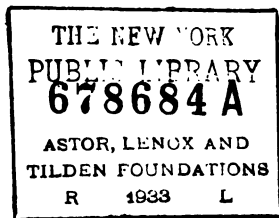
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RED FLOWERS

NOTED FROM G. M. J.

RED FLOWERS

CHAPTER I

I

IT is sunset. A dusty, traveled-stained wayfarer tramps slowly on weary feet into the lake-town of Slaviánsk. This wanderer is dressed in the garb of a Russian peasant; he wears on his head, well pulled down over his eyes, a visored cap; his noticeably broad shoulders and athletic torso are boldly revealed by the clinging folds of a blood-red *rubáshka*,¹ belted in tightly and falling almost to the knees; his baggy trousers are stuffed into dusty, half-leg boots.

The stranger's countenance is burned a deep, dark red by the fiery heat of the steppe sun; his beard shines goldenly in contrast. This leonine face, with its smoldering blue eyes, is not the face of a peasant.

Peasant-carts jog by him on the white steppe road, sending clouds of smoke-like, choking dust behind. Half-drunken peasants, sitting with their dusty boots hung over the edge of the carts, as they roll by, shout jovial greetings at him, in some mysterious Little Russian dialect of which he cannot understand a word.

He skirts green woods, from which come peasant women in blue fustian dresses, bearing baskets filled with yellow and brown mushrooms. He passes a grimy brick factory, disgorging tired workmen, whose faces and hands are caked red with brick-dust.

Finally he debouches into a wide grassy esplanade. There are villas on both sides. He hears the tinkling of a piano; the sound of a far-off accordion from some distant courtyard.

To the left he sees a street that cuts the esplanade at right angles. Limping slightly, he plods down towards it, turns the corner of a thick hedge, and encounters a tall, aristocratic man in

¹ Russian blouse.

immaculate white linen, with slanting eyes and a bush of beard as black as India ink.

"Your pardon," he said suddenly, as he faced him. "Is this Slaviánsk?"

"Slaviánsk, yes," the bearded gentleman made courteous but indifferent response, as he passed on.

Across the grass-grown road stretched a greening Park. The wayfarer dragged himself slowly across and entered the Park through a revolving stile. Under tall, sighing oak and poplar trees, whose waving crests caught the red shimmer of the sunset, he made his way down a broad white path till he came to a palisade, guarded by a high, scrolled door; started to go through, and was stopped by a cry from a booth window at the right.

"Show your card!"

He went over to the window.

"What card?" he asked the bearded peasant there.

"Your season ticket, what?"

"I have none."

"Then you must pay."

"How much?"

"Thirty kopeks."

The stranger paid the thirty kopeks and went in, just as a long sweet strain of music fell melodiously upon his ears.

2

Before his tired eyes stretched a chain of wide and blooming gardens. In the middle of a spacious square stood a proscenium of yellow wood: a large Kursal rose on the right, and a dense throng of promenaders, men and women, strolled between long rows of benches, occupied by a laughing, chatting throng.

The orchestra was playing a requiem by Mussórgsky: he recognized the solemn minor as he approached.

He took his big pack from his shoulders, let it fall on the sanded path at his feet, and seated himself upon a bench some distance away from the proscenium, at the junction of the path by which he had come with the main promenade. A couple of very pretty girls in white who were sitting there cast at him a quick and curious glance as he took off his peaked cap and wiped his hot brow, and the one nearest him moved her white skirt away.

Somewhat bewildered, after the long solitude of the steppe, by the promenaders in continuous motion, and lulled by the rhythm of the music, which was remarkably well executed, the wanderer,

physically spent after his long tramp, gazed dully at the animated scene before him. He noted a couple of dusty-booted, bestial-faced gendarmes, who stood near the Kursal, facing the bench on which he sat. From the belt of each hung a leather revolver pouch, into which was stuck a big Browning, loaded, and ready for instant use.

As the stranger gazed, he became aware that something unusual was occurring near the proscenium. Many heads were turned, many eyes were gazing; promenaders were stopping in the middle of the broad esplanade, and everybody, judging from appearances, was talking and commenting like mad. At first he could not see the cause of this excitement on account of the density of the strolling throng, but soon a rift opened and he beheld a number of officers walking together in a compact group.

One of them, in the center of the group, strode somewhat ahead of the others. This was a very tall, very striking looking officer of the Guard—fair, with a sweeping blond mustache. A Colonel, evidently, from his shoulder-straps and the broad red stripe that ran down the leg of his regimental breeches, wide at the sides, but closely fitted below into high and very shiny cavalry boots, adorned with clinking spurs. He walked with a firm and masterful bearing, holding with his left hand the hilt of his clattering saber, glancing at those who passed with cold, yet magnetic eyes of gray. In his other hand he held a leather thong, looped at the end, which, from time to time, he switched against his lacquered boot-leg.

It was clear that the appearance of this superb and majestic officer had put the Park into a flutter. The very musicians neglected their scores to look, and, falling behind, frantically hurried to catch up, inflicting one false note after another on the martyred ears of the outraged Director. Every one seemed to be shaken as by some momentous event: the coming of *Gosuddr*,¹ for instance. People talked in low, excited tones. All eyes were fixed on the same objective point.

As the observer gazed in turn, he heard the comment of the girls who sat beside him.

"Makedónsky! Makedónsky!" cried one of them excitedly. "He just arrived this afternoon from Warsaw!"

"Yes," replied the other, equally excited. "The officer whose picture was in all the papers!"

"At Port Arthur. He swam through all the mines and bombs: they shot at him several times. He bears a charmed life."

¹ Literally "Lord." The former Czar.

"As brave as a lion. Absolutely reckless of his life, and everything else. Several duels. He has killed more than once!"

"They say he is a terrible carouser, gambles and drinks; the women fairly persecute him, *on se l'arrache!* He has only to raise his hand—he can get his pick. And he knows it, too—they say he despises women."

"Handsome! He must be fascinating!"

"Oh, I wish some one would introduce us to him! I *adore* officers! Especially Makedónsky! I would love to talk to him!"

"They say he writes poetry!"

"Sings like an angel. And plays the piano *divinely!*"

"An all-round man, my brother called him. He said that the soldiers of Makedónsky's regiment worship him—that they would follow him to Hell. Let's go down and walk on the esplanade and steal a good look at him."

"A splendid idea!" The two girls rose hastily and departed.

The wanderer, who had not lost a word, gazed at the tall and haughty guardsman with renewed interest. The brilliant officer, followed by his satellites, turned at the Kursal and walked back toward the Lake. A few moments later the whole contingent returned. This time they passed beyond the Kursal, took seats at the little round tables of the open-air buffet and ordered drinks. Chatting and laughing, they smoked their cigarettes and drank their red wine or vodka. The wanderer could hear disjointed fragments of their conversation as they talked, and gathered from these that they were discussing that subject of universal interest—Women.

Meanwhile the fickle public interest seemed now to have shifted to a new center. A young woman, very fair and golden-haired, whose toilet was so distinctive, whose whole bearing and demeanor were so much those of some beautiful foreign Princess that the gazing and commenting began anew. But this time the wanderer had no one to orientate him.

Accompanied by a tall, very dark, very black-bearded man, of a slightly Mongolian cast of countenance, and of a refined and cultured mien—whom the wanderer immediately recognized as the man whom he had encountered and addressed as he entered Slaviánsk—she walked slowly and gracefully along the esplanade. The watcher caught the glint of golden hair from beneath a large Leghorn hat, over which drooped red roses; the gleam of turquoise blue eyes below; the white splendor of a bare throat. . . . One hand lifted slightly the skirt of her white lace frock, revealing amid a froth of chiffon her slimly delicate

ankles and small, elegantly shod feet; the other hand dangled a single crimson rose.

The Princess Incognita, or whoever she might be, came by the buffet with her escort. The latter stopped and asked her a question. She assented languidly, and the two entered the buffet just as Makedónsky and his friends arose to go. As they passed, the officer's eyes met, caught, and held hers for an instant's space. The lady's escort gazed keenly at the masterful officer; stopped, with an exclamation, and called him by name:

"Makedónsky!"

The officer's eyes turned like a flash; he stopped, glanced, then, smiling with perfect self-possession, came to his accoster with outstretched hand.

"Prince Tatárinoff! Do I actually behold you again?"

"It has been several years, Colonel. Let me have the pleasure of presenting you to my friend, Liubóff Sergiévna Babróva, just returned from the Crimea. Liubóff Sergiévna—this is Colonel Makedónsky."

Liubóff Sergiévna smiled graciously; the officer touched his high-peaked military cap.

*"Óchen rad—Óchen pridno."*¹

"Are you here for long?" asked he whom Makedónsky called Prince Tatárinoff.

"I can't tell—I hardly know. I came more for business than for pleasure. And you?"

The face of the handsome officer as he spoke grew cold and smileless. The blond lady gazed at him intently, then looked away as her glance caught his.

"I am here for the summer," replied Tatárinoff. "I find that Slaviánsk is not such a bad place after all."

"Peter the Great bathed here. Who are we to disapprove of that on which the greatest of our rulers placed the seal of his approval? But I must not detain you and your friend. I am staying provisionally at the *dácha*² of a friend of mine, a fellow soldier. But I have already made arrangements to take a place of my own. . . . My orderly is coming on to-morrow with a load of my personal belongings. I suppose we shall meet daily in the Park, or at the Bathing Pavilion? You must come to see me."

"I shall be glad to come, thank you, and also to have you visit at my home. My estates are in the Slaviánsk district, you know, scarcely eight versts' distance."

¹Very glad. Very pleasant. The usual Russian formula.

²Villa.

"With pleasure. Au revoir then, meantime. Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

"Madame," corrected Prince Tatárinoff, with a courteous smile.

"So young? Your pardon. Au revoir, Madame!"

"Au revoir, Monsieur le Colonel!"

The officer exchanged last greetings with the Prince and his pretty companion, and passed on, turning once to gaze after them, just in time to catch the eye of the Prince's friend. He smiled and bowed—a greeting which she acknowledged slightly before she turned again.

Makedónsky walked away with his firm, masterful step in company with his fellow officers. The wanderer gazed after the Prince's companion, already moving with languid grace toward a nearby table. His blue eyes smoldered.

"She is beautiful!" he muttered, half aloud. His voice held a queer note.

He turned reluctantly when the Prince and the blond lady seated themselves at a table about a dozen feet away. After a moment he fumbled in his pocket, and took out his pipe and a package of tobacco.

He became aware that some one had sat on the bench beside him. It was a girl, of course—Slaviánsk seemed to be full of girls. The newcomer wore a dress of some light summer material, with white shoes and hose to match. Gazing obliquely at her face, he saw that her hair beneath the jaunty little hat rippled, darkly brown, with tawny gleams; that her eyes, very large and full beneath her dark, somewhat slanting brows, were of a deep, bright gray. She was gazing off toward the proscenium with what seemed to him a sad expression.

Just as he decided that she was very pretty, and rather interesting, he saw her smile and bow to some one. Following her gaze, he saw that she had greeted the beautiful lady and her escort, the Prince, both of whom had turned their heads. The Prince, after a remark aside, rose and came to the girl by the wanderer's side.

"Eléna Borisovna, *zdrástè!*¹ Will you not join us?" he asked with exquisite courtesy, as he bared his head. The stranger noted the intense blackness of his hair, matching the raven hue of the luxuriant beard, the slant of the tawny, smiling eyes, the prominence of the maxillary bones, which pushed out noticeably the tightly drawn skin. "Liubóff Sergiévna and I have but just sat down to have an ice."

¹ Greeting. Literally, "Be healthy!"

"Thank you, Prince," the girl replied quickly. "You are very kind . . . If you will forgive me . . . I believe Grigóri Maksímich was to meet me here. . . ."

"Ah, in that case . . ."

"Tell Liúba I expect to see her this evening," added the girl, as the Prince turned to go.

"With pleasure, Eléna Borísovna." The Prince bowed again and departed.

"Eléna Borísovna. . . . So that was her name. . . . Acquainted with a Mongol Prince, and what seems to be a Princess or some beautiful actress *du high-life*," ran the stranger's mental analysis. "Liúba . . . I wonder who she is."

He felt lonely. . . . All these people knew each other. They belonged to a circle into which he would probably be unable to enter, even if he decided to stay on in Slaviánsk.

Dismissing an impulse to rise and depart, he crossed one booted leg over the other. The day was almost over, and he was still without lodgings for the night. Yet he was weary, and this Russian summer Park was very beautiful, and animate with a strange, new life the aspects of which he had not yet been able to study during his long tramp south. . . . He decided that he would remain for a while and watch the brilliant scene. Later he would synthesize his scattered impressions, and record them in his book of Russian notes.

3

Suddenly the Park orchestra broke forth into the solemn harmonies of the national anthem. The stranger noted how the promenaders doffed their hats as they rose, or turned, and started on their outward way from the Park. The human tide surged forth tumultuously, poured into paths leading to the various exits, flowed by the bench on which the wanderer sat. In sonorous Russian they chatted gayly: the light, facile laughter of the young girls and women, who were all beautifully dressed, echoed on the warm, late afternoon air. . . . Many of the men, in their white flannel or linen suits, seemed dandified, as they twirled their light canes. . . . There were many students in blue silk *rubáshki*,¹ belted in tightly, at exactly the chic angle, over their narrow green trousers adorned with a semi-military stripe. Here and there in the procession some portly valetudinarian general limped by between two canes, the wide, flaring red stripe of his uniform breeches making a brilliant splash of color as he passed.

¹Russian blouses.

Amongst them came also Makedónsky, the object as before of all gazes, accompanied by his military bodyguard. What must have been the stupefaction of all, and how their tongues must have wagged when they saw Makedónsky the Magnificent detach himself and walk straight to a young and attractive girl who sat but a short distance from the Kursal on a bench, the only other occupant of which was a dusty-booted, deeply sunburned peasant whose sack lay on the graveled path before him: saw Makedónsky bow and speak to her, smile and sit beside her, royally indifferent to the fate of the disconcerted military contingent which, after saluting stiffly yet reverentially, closed ranks and fell back slowly and in some disorder.

The girl whom the great Makedónsky had so honored gazed up into his strong and masterful face with what seemed to the silent observer to be something resembling panic. . . . Her oval cheeks were crimson as the tall and aristocratic officer, whose very name had become legendary, left the group of brilliant, gaudily-clad warriors and approached her.

"Mademoiselle Malinóffsky! I am Makedónsky. . . . Allow me to recall myself to your memory. I had the honor of dancing with you three years ago at a military ball in Khárkoff."

"I remember," The flush still lingered on the girl's face. "It was my first ball."

"Your first ball. I remember you told me so as we waltzed. May I be allowed to sit beside you and evoke the past?"

.. "*Pozhduista!*" (If you please.)

Makedónsky, holding his big sword and scabbard away from him, seated himself beside her on the bench, crossed his booted legs with easy grace, and turned on her his compelling gaze. She lifted her head and looked up at him expectantly. The silent observer noted the officer's golden, curling hair, the long, red scar upon the temple, the heavy brows, the commanding gaze, the eagle nose, the iron-strong, cruel, yet sensuous mouth beneath the Viking curve of blonde mustache, the deep cleft in the chin. Nor did the broad sweep of the epauletted shoulders, the athletic slenderness of waist, the long, symmetrical line of thigh and booted leg escape his attention.

"You were charming. I picked you out of the whole room. You were very young, almost a child. And yet there was something in your face—you drew me——"

"Really?" was all the girl could say.

"Really!" repeated Makedónsky seriously; his eyes, it seemed to the watcher, blazed with a white fire, full of gleaming corus-

cations; such eyes, he thought, might easily hypnotize a weaker will.

"You had on a red dress——".

"Excuse me a moment," Makedónsky broke off suddenly, took from his pocket a small memorandum book, wrote a few lines and tore out the page; then, catching the eye of one of the group of officers just passing again, he beckoned him over and gave him the paper, with a low request which the wanderer did not hear.

"You were very young and slim," he went on. "You wore a red dress with a modest *décolleté*. Your throat was like a slender lily. Your eyes were as they are now, a deep and tender gray, like the eyes of Sniegúrochka,¹ I imagine, just after she came to life. . . . And your mouth, unspoiled and innocent, still childish, was a sweet torment to one who . . ."

"Don't!" said the girl in a low voice, turning her face away from him.

At that moment the orchestra, which had just finished the Czar's anthem and was preparing to pack away its instruments and disperse, showed signs of renewed activity, and after a moment began to play a languorous melody. . . . A waltz, which the stranger had never heard before. . . . He noted how the girl looked up quickly, recognition flashing in her eyes. . . .

"I sent word to the Director to play it." Makedónsky's glance was keen and luminous. "Does it bring it back to you, that first wonderful ball of yours?"

"Yes," murmured the girl, raising her eyes to his, and immediately lowering them. Her agitation was clear to the silent spectator. Her bosom rose and fell swiftly, and a hot flush burned redly in her cheeks. . . . It was also clear to him that Makedónsky perceived the girl's agitation, and that it pleased him.

"Tell me one thing," said Makedónsky.

"What?" Her voice was scarcely audible.

"Are you married yet?"

"No . . . I . . . I am engaged . . ."

A sudden smile played on the strong and sensuous lips beneath the blonde mustache.

"It makes no difference. . . . Merely curiosity. . . . And now tell me, when shall I have another waltz?"

The girl raised her eyes again swiftly and looked at him.

"There is always a Charity Ball in Slaviánsk. I will dance with you then, if you are here."

¹ A figure of Russian folk-lore. "Snow-white."

"As many dances as I demand?"

"Yes."

"Don't forget that promise!" Makedónsky smiled—a sweet and sudden smile, as he rose. "Are you sure you will keep it?"

"I always keep my word," she declared proudly, gazing up at him. "I will dance with you then."

"A thousand thanks. *Do svidánia.*"¹

"*Do svidánia!*" The girl seemed suddenly to have regained her composure. In the presence of five hundred pairs of eyes she held out to him her hand.

He took it ceremonially in his own white and shapely hand and pressed it; rose, touched the visor of his cap in a military salute, smiled and was gone, with his clattering saber and clinking spurs; tall, strong, elegant, wholly master of himself and of his destiny.

4

The observer lowered his eyes for a moment, and did not look at the girl. When he did so, he saw that she was gazing straight before her, completely absorbed in some inner world; the big gray eyes shone like stars, the lips curved in an unconscious smile. . . .

An officer who was passing stopped, sank down on the bench between her and the seeming peasant, and lighted a cigarette. The girl was quite oblivious to his coming. Only the peasant's eyes, which scrutinized and studied every one with peculiar interest, noted that he wore the cap and uniform of a Captain of Gendarmes, that he had an unmistakably brutal face, with shaggy brows, a big nose, and a beard so fair it looked like tow, and that he was smoking a yellow-tubed cigarette.

They had sat thus together, the three of them, all strangers to one another, all representatives of different worlds, for scarcely a minute, when the Event occurred.

It happened so quickly that the observer scarcely realized what it meant until it was all over. A slight, tall figure in a black blouse ran out from around the hedge of the big garden that edged the promenade. Something glittered in his hand. . . . With a choked, triumphant cry—two words—he threw out the hand which held the glittering object; there came a loud, sharp crack which detonated amid a flash of red flame and a cloud of smoke. Almost at the same moment the gendarme officer on the bench where the peasant and the pretty girl sat, with a

¹ Au revoir.

deep hiccough, fell over sideways in a strange, crumpled position, one braided sleeve hanging over the edge of the bench, the nerveless fingers of the big veined hand releasing the burning cigarette, which slipped to the ground and lay there smoking. And, as the peasant and the girl leaped startled to their feet, the assassin ran by, waving the glittering revolver in his hand.

The two gendarmes at the Kursal, galvanized into menacing life, ran heavily after him, as he vaulted over a low fence, and sped like a deer across the closely shaven grass. Their big Brownings barked twice. The fleeing man stopped suddenly, writhed, his thin arms in the air; his revolver dropped, and he suddenly fell forward upon his face and lay still. Other gendarmes, who seemed to spring from nowhere, followed and pounced upon him, lifted him by the shoulders and feet, and carried him into the Kursal. The two gendarmes who had shot him came back to the bench where the officer still lay, in the same crumpled position. Their small, blue eyes, as they approached panting, blazed fiercely in their congested faces.

"A curse!" one of them said as he lifted the officer's face, and peered into it. "He killed him!"

"Lift him up and bring him in!" commanded the other. "Away with you *rotozéi!*"¹ he growled roughly at the peasant. "Go away, *bárishnaya,*"² he said to the girl. "Away!" he cried roughly to the surging throng.

They took up the stout and heavy body, and lugged it off, the officer's high boots hanging limply over their arms.

"Oh, terrible!" exclaimed the girl, with blanched cheeks, as she turned her frightened gaze on the man in peasant garb. "Oh, terrible; terrible!"

"Frightful!" he agreed, hardly glancing at her, as he followed the movements of the gendarmes, just vanishing with their inanimate burden into the Kursal.

"It frightened me so!" The girl was trembling violently. Suddenly she began to cry, and went away, not glancing back. The wayfarer took up his pack, and followed the crowd.

The sun set scarletly resplendent over the big green Park, though whose eastern trees came a silver glint of lake water. The music had stopped, and the excited musicians mingled with the vociferating, neurasthenic crowd. Men and women of all ages and degrees stood in groups, loudly telling what had happened; arguing, disputing, predicting.

¹ "Gaper."

² Young lady.

The officer was Liútin, the Captain of Gendarmes from Rostóff. He had run up to Slaviánsk for a day's outing; they said he had a sweetheart here. He had been shot dead. Killed instantly, yes. The assassin was a student of Rostóff. A mere boy. He was in the Kursal. Dying. Liútin was notorious for his cruelty in Rostóff. He was an important figure of the *Okhrána*.¹ They said he had arrested and imprisoned one of the boy's relatives.

"As bad as the Revolution of 1905."

"We'll have another revolution yet!"

"Sh!"

"That's nothing; there are always assassinations in Russia."

"How—nothing?"

"The *Okhrána* ought to be wiped out of existence!"

"Poor boy! So young. His poor mother!"

"He died for freedom, *gospodá!*"²

The listener caught much of this comment, as he lingered, and passed. Filled with some queer inner excitement, he inquired his way to the station, and left the Park through the high Southern gate.

At the station he found his trunk; it had been there for weeks, the attendant said. This man showed him a cheap little hotel over an apothecary shop almost opposite the station, and he went over and took a small room temporarily. In a dingy arborescent restaurant, already filled with excited discussion of the assassination, he ate a heavy meal of cabbage soup smothered with sour cream, followed by stuffed meat-cakes, washed down with *kvas*; ³ then he went up to his room, and sat by the big open window and smoked, looking down on the high trees of the Park. Puffing forth great clouds of smoke, he meditated.

A strangely dramatic beginning to his visit to the South Russian lake-town, Slaviánsk. . . .

He lay in his narrow Russian bed, listening to the faint pulsation of the music, which had begun again in the Park, thinking of all his experiences of the past months, since he had entered Russia from the North. Deep and poignant thoughts. And then the tragedy of the Park returned to him, and he began to brood, and wonder.

Like doom from a clear sky had Death come to this Gendarme

¹The secret police.

²A collective vocative, approximate to "Ladies and Gentlemen," though less formal in Russian.

³A fermented drink.

Captain. What of the fanatic boy who had killed him, and who lay in the Kursal that summer night, so very still?

The two words he had uttered when he had shot Liútin; the wanderer could hear them still, loud and triumphant.

"Za svobódu!" (For freedom.)

Would Russia ever be free?

How beautiful the blond Princess had been! Liúba—What a beautiful name!

The other girl—Eléna Borísovna. . . . She, too, was charming, but in a wholly different way. . . . Fascinated . . . fascinated by Makedónsky.

More and more vaguely, further and further away, he heard the wooden clappers of the night-watchman's rattle somewhere in the courtyards of the avenue of villas that lay behind. . . .

CHAPTER II

I

THE following day the stranger did not awaken until nearly ten o'clock. He had slept soundly, the heavy, dreamless slumber of a man physically exhausted. He rose and washed, then opened his trunk and removed some clothes. After deliberation he chose a blue serge suit, a wide-brimmed Panama hat, low tan shoes and a silver-headed cane. The rough people in the inn room below stared at him curiously as he came in for breakfast, a meal which consisted of boiling hot tea, cold meat and cheese, and dark rye bread.

After this repast he sought out the innkeeper, a stout, dark, good-natured Little Russian, who looked with respectful amazement at the transformation wrought over night.

"Is there a hotel in Slaviánsk?" he asked.

"A hotel? . . . No! But there is the Sanatorium."

"A Sanatorium! I am not sick."

"It is not necessary to be sick to live there," returned the innkeeper. "All the *gospodá*¹ live at the Sanatorium: it's the only first-class place in Slaviánsk."

"Where is it?"

The innkeeper took the wanderer by the arm, and led him out the door.

"Yonder," he directed, pointing off to the left. "Enter the Park, or go along by it, cross to the main street, go up a little way, near the end of the Park, and you'll find it."

The stranger thanked him, asked for his bill, and paid the amount demanded, which was considerably higher than it would have been had he not changed his attire. But of this he took no heed.

"May I leave my trunk here until I find out if there is a room free at the Sanatorium?" he asked.

"*Mózhno.*" (It is possible.)

The stranger departed, walking toward the Park, from which

¹ Gentlemen.

issued, dimmed somewhat by distance, the music of the orchestra. When he reached the high, scrolled gateway he turned off abruptly, and walked straight across a broad and empty road skirting the Park. After a few minutes he reached the end of the big enclosure, and found himself in a wide, grassy street, without sidewalks, which fronted the Park, and seemed to extend for a considerable distance.

He crossed this street, and followed it for some distance, passing villa after villa, standing in a long, white, irregular row facing the Park. Some of them were shut off by hedges: others were set far back from the street. A *bába* (peasant-woman) who wore men's boots, clumped out of a gate, and came toward him.

"Tell me—where is the Sanatorium?" he asked.

The *bába*, who had a brown and wrinkled face, and eyes as blue as cornflowers, half turned and pointed a finger.

"Thither, *bárin*."

The wanderer went on for another three or four minutes. At last he reached an enclosure within which stood a large group of villas, all centering about a white, two-storied building with double terraces, supported on Doric columns of wood. The central edifice seemed to be surrounded by a small forest of high linden trees, the feathery tops of which sighed and rustled in the breeze. These trees bordered a wide, graveled path which led up to the lower terrace by a flight of steps. A number of people, men and women, were seated on the terrace; a few women, in elegant morning attire, lolled upon the steps.

Deciding that this must be the Sanatorium, he turned in at the gate, and went up the path. A dark-browed, rather handsome woman sitting on a bench by the side of the path, and reading a book, gazed up at him curiously as he passed. As he ascended the steps, he became the focus of the gaze of all the people grouped on the steps and on the terrace. Having reached the terrace, he stopped and looked around inquiringly. No one came to meet him. He turned to a young officer, with dark, misanthropic eyes and a small brown mustache, who sat alone moodily smoking a cigarette on a bench before one of the high white windows.

"Your pardon—is this the Sanatorium?"

"The Sanatorium—yes," responded the young officer, in a deep, rather guttural voice.

"Could you tell me whom I could see about taking a small villa?"

The young officer rose, without a word, walked with clinking spurs to the big central door, which was wide open, and called in deep chest tones:

"Evgénia Yermoláevna!"

After a short silence, he called again.

"*Shtò?*" (What?) responded a loud and booming voice, more like that of a man than of a woman.

"A gentleman . . . concerning a villa."

"Coming!" boomed the voice.

The young officer resumed his seat, and went on smoking, with the same somber and oblivious air. A moment later there appeared in the doorway a short, stout woman considerably over middle age, garbed in a soiled pink wrapper with a long train that dragged behind her majestically. A woman with an astonishingly conical head, surmounted by a pyramid of grizzled hair from which was erupted, as from the crater of a small volcano, a cloud of escaping meshes; with eyes that gleamed like two green fires, a wide and sagging mouth, a prognathous jaw and extraordinarily long arms, completing the impression which the stranger received of a short, squat, chimpanzee.

Seeing the stranger, she accosted him unceremoniously, in loud, rough tones:

"You wish a villa?"

"Yes." An involuntary smile twisted up his bearded lips.

"Enter!" The woman turned and disappeared within. The stranger followed her into the hall, which she crossed, and issued through another door into a spacious enclosure, in which stood the small township of villas which he had perceived from the street. Turning off to the right, she led him through a narrow gate into the wide, grassy, open place which he recognized as the road by which he had come from the steppe the afternoon before. This square she crossed with a fierce energy, which made him smile again: she looked, he thought, like a General charging a redoubt. Once across, she stormed up the steps of one of the villas fronting on this side, opened the door, ushered him in, and sank upon a willow divan, breathing heavily.

"This is the place," she panted, her hand upon her heaving bosom.

The stranger looked around him. The villa was small, consisting only of two rooms. The outer room was furnished with the barest necessities, a table, two chairs, a small willow settee;

the inner room had a small iron bed placed close to the wall, an armchair, a commode, a Russian washstand, and matting on the floor.

"How do you like it?" demanded Evgénia Yermoláevna.

"It's rather small," returned the stranger critically. "I really need more space."

"Space or no space, it's all we have left!" boomed Evgénia. "And every room in the Sanatorium is taken, and it's this or nothing, so make up your mind quick, and let's have an end to it, for I've got work to do, and must do it, and have no time to be bothering and dickering like an Armenian peddler, and that's all there is to it!"

He looked at her in amazement; this, he thought, was plain-speaking with a vengeance.

"If you have nothing else, I suppose I'll have to take it——"

Evgénia snatched further words from his mouth.

"All right, then it's settled. Tell me, is it for yourself or your family?"

"For myself."

"For how long?"

"I don't know. A week—a month—two months—as long as I feel like staying."

"You seem to be very undecided in your plans, young man!" declared Evgénia Yermoláevna in the loud and super-energetic way which seemed to be habitual with her. She looked at him shrewdly, taking in his appearance frankly and openly.

He smiled; this woman amused him.

"I am," he admitted, leaning against the frame of the door. "I live that way. What I do depends on my feelings."

"And a very bad system!" howled Evgénia, with emphatic disapproval. "People who live by their feelings are people who can never be relied upon. Artistic temperament, they call it. . . . Bosh! Give *me* people who know what they are going to do, and when, and have some plans and a head on them, and who live like reasonable beings and not like moonstruck, wool-gathering *duraki* (idiots)!"

"I regret that my system doesn't please you," he replied humorously. "However, that's the way I am, and I can't be changed. So let's consider whether or not you will rent your villa to a person so unreliable; in other words, let's talk business."

"Now you talk like a rational being!" snapped Evgénia. "Business we can talk. Two hundred rubles a month if you

stay a month, with board at the Sanatorium, and the same rate for any time beyond that. In advance. Understand?"

"I understand." The stranger took out a big wallet from his inner pocket, and selecting two hundred-ruble notes, handed them to her. Evgénia took them, and stowed them away in some mysterious hiding place in her capacious bosom.

"When do you move in?"

"As soon as I can get my trunk. It is now at the inn near the station, where I stayed last night."

"Good. You must leave your passport with me to-day for the police to stamp."

Evgénia looked him over again in her shrewd and penetrating way.

"Now that we have disposed of business, we can talk for pleasure," she remarked. "I see that you are a foreigner. What is your nationality?"

The prospective tenant smiled again.

"Are you sure I am not a Russian?"

"Sure? . . . Of course I'm sure. Haven't I been talking with you for five minutes, and haven't I heard you talk; and do you think I don't know my own mother's tongue, with your imbecile questions and your mysterious smiles, and your beatings about the bush? Russian you speak and well, if I must say it, but your accent is that of some accursed foreigner, French or Italian or German. . . . How do I know where you come from, do you think?"

"Guess!" said the stranger, anticipating her reaction.

Evgénia Yermoláevna made a furious gesture.

"I have no time for guessing, young man. If you had *my* work to do, you wouldn't spend your time in guessing, either. Out with it now, and give an account of yourself!"

"I am English, and not English!" he tantalized, enjoying her impatience.

"English and not English—what does *that* mean?" demanded Evgénia, angrily. "Cat and not cat: dog and not dog. What in the name of all the Saints and Devils *are* you, then?"

"I am an American," he announced at last; afraid, or disinclined, to keep her longer in suspense.

"An *American*?" Evgénia looked as mystified and astonished as though he had said he was a troglodyte. The American burst out into a ringing peal of laughter, and after a moment Evgénia laughed with him, her fiercely flaming green eyes softening and filling with a humorous light.

"You are a long way from home, young man!" she said. "How do they call you?"

"Stephen Earle."

"Steeffen Airl? . . . Do you call *that* a name?" demanded Evgénia. "What is your given name and patronymic, if you are a Christian, and not a heathen idol?"

"My given name is Stephen, as I told you. . . . Stepán in Russian. My father's name is George. Geórgevich is as near as you can get to it. So, I suppose, according to Russian custom you would call me Stepán Geórgevich."

"Stepán—Geórgevich—Airl. . . . Good!" rejoined Evgénia with satisfaction. "Now I can talk to you, and know to whom I'm talking. I—you may, or may not know, am Evgénia Yermoláevna, part owner and manager with Dr. Malinóffsky of this accursed Sanatorium, and trouble enough it gives me, I assure you! And now that we've talked business, and come to an agreement, I will send one of my servants to the inn for your trunks; they will be delivered this very afternoon—trust me for that! . . . And let me say, young man, that I like you, and that I think we're going to get on famously this summer, and be good friends, and here's my hand on it!"

Earle pressed the enormous, muscular hand which Evgénia presented to him, his blond mustache twitching. This woman, Evgénia Yermoláevna, was a type. Obviously plain-spoken to the utmost, absolutely in the open, and fundamentally good-hearted, he diagnosed her character.

"Come now with me to the Sanatorium," said Evgénia, "and I'll make you acquainted with the Doctor and with Ekaterína Ivánovna."

Who Ekaterína Ivánovna was Earle had, of course, no way of telling. He followed Evgénia as she rose and bolted unceremoniously out of the villa in another determined charge across the grassy rectangle and through the courtyard to the Sanatorium, which they reëntered from the rear. Across the coolly shadowed, lofty hall she moved at top speed, her flaming peignoir trailing behind her majestically, and plunged through a door which bore an official looking sign which Earl had no time to read.

She stopped short before a large desk, at which sat an old man with a bald, powerful head, large dark eyes filled with what seemed to be a combination of suffering and misanthropy, a yellow, parchment-like face, and a long white beard which streamed luxuriantly over his light pongee coat.

"Doctor!" howled Evgénia in stentorian tones. "I have brought this gentleman to see you. He will live with us for a week, or a month, or a year, or a century, depending on his feelings, if you please. An American, Stepán Geórgévich Airl is his name in good Russian, and I'll leave him now with you to tell all he knows or doesn't know, for I have to go back to my work making the idle hussies work who say they work for us. . . . *Proshchdetè* (Farewell)!"

And without another word, she turned and departed.

3

The Doctor, who had risen and who proved to be a man of extraordinary height, well over six feet in stature, with a powerful if shrunken frame, stepped forward and offered the American his hand.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," he said, in a voice that was deep and resonant, yet not loud. "I am Dr. Borís Malinóffsky, part owner of the Sanatorium. You understand Russian, it seems?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"You are sunburned," remarked Dr. Malinóffsky, surveying Earle's deeply tanned face and neck. "Where have you come from, if I may ask?"

"I have walked across the steppe."

"In all this heat? . . . You surprise me." The doctor smiled, but very slightly. This, Earle decided, was a reserved and unloquacious man, the antithesis of the other owner, Evgénia. "Why not by railroad?"

"I am a writer," explained Earle. "When I want to study a people, I put on workman's or peasant's attire and wander through the whole country on foot. During the past year I have walked all the way from Petersburg to the Black Sea, and now I am on my way to Siberia and the Far East."

"That is a formidable undertaking," commented Dr. Malinóffsky. "But why, may I ask, did you come to Slaviánsk?"

"I heard in Odessa that it was a remarkable spot—a Russian watering-place where all types of Russians gather, and being a student of Russian psychology, I wanted to come and register my impressions."

"You have come to the right place," observed Dr. Malinóffsky, with his reserved smile. "A more extraordinary and conglomerate fusion of Russian types and classes cannot be found than here

in Slaviánsk. I have been summering here for the past five years, and I tell you this from my own experience. Do you know any one here?" he concluded.

"No. But I have a letter. . . . Perhaps you can tell me how to find the person to whom it is addressed. . . ."

The American took out his wallet again, found a letter, and read the superscription.

"Piótr Samóilovich Daníloff."

"Daníloff? He is a friend of mine!" exclaimed Dr. Malinóffsky. "He lives in a villa near the steppe, only a short distance from here, with his married daughter Vera de Marly. *Nu*, do you wish to present your letter immediately?"

"Yes, I think it would be as well. . . . The lady who brought me here——" Earle broke off, and smiled reminiscently. Dr. Malinóffsky smiled also; the two men understood each other without spoken words.

"Evgénia Yermoláevna is a character," the Doctor said, still smiling. "I hope you were not offended by her lack of ceremony or by anything she said. She means no offense. She has a heart of gold. . . . She is of peasant stock, and proud of it. Incidentally she is very keen and has amassed considerable property, of which this Sanatorium is part."

"She is a genuine character, and unmistakably sincere. I like her."

"I hope you will find your stay both interesting and profitable." Dr. Malinóffsky courteously pressed his hand. "I should be glad to have you call on me at any time. The spare moments which I get from my practice, I use in scientific labors upon which I have been engaged for some time. . . ." He waved a long arm to a large case of test tubes near the window "and on the editing of therapeutical works. . . ."

"Then I must not bother you. . . ."

"On the contrary, it will give me pleasure . . . relaxation. . . . I am very much interested in the English people. But I must not detain you. . . ."

Dr. Malinóffsky opened the door of his study, which overlooked the terrace, and looked out.

"Kátia!" he called in his deep and rasping accents.

A diminutive, weasened little figure, a woman of about sixty, with gray hair neatly arranged in bandeaus and faded, gentle blue eyes peering through big gold spectacles, rose from a bench where she sat talking with several other women, came with short toddling steps to the door of the study, and looked in-

quiringly at the Doctor and then at the tall, sunburned stranger.

"Kátia," said the Doctor, briefly, "this is Monsieur Stéphane Earle, an American writer, who has taken one of Evgénia's villas, and will stay with us at least a part of the summer. Monsieur Earle, let me make you acquainted with my wife, Ekaterína Ivánovna."

Ekaterína Ivánovna smiled benignly, and like a diminutive queen held out her little hand to be kissed. There was something mischievous and infantile in her smile, which wrinkled the skin of her small, soft face, seamed with fine lines like the surface of a baked apple, into a thousand little creases. And yet there was sadness in her, the sadness that comes, with the fulfillment of the years, to the bearer of children and the sharer of her man's destinies. Something quick and mercurial, nonetheless; she made Earle think of a little gray mother-squirrel; yes, that was it, a little mother squirrel. He kissed her hand with such respect that her soft blue eyes beamed on him through the big gold spectacles, and he felt that he had made a good impression.

"You are an American?" she said. "When I was a young girl, in Paris, I met several Americans. . . . In Berlin, also. . . . I liked them very much. . . ."

Her voice was soft and weak, like her personality; she was gentle and yielding in disposition, he thought, as she rambled on, in a desultory, inconsequential way; quite different from the tall, stern man, who towered over her, in whose dark and gloomy eyes and grim expression little softness or resiliency was apparent.

"Nu, Kátia, we must not detain Monsieur Earle," Dr. Malinóffsky intervened brusquely. "He has a letter to present to Piótr Samóilovich. . . ." He turned suddenly, and called to the young officer who still sat moodily smoking near the door.

"Anatól!" he rasped imperiously. "Come here!"

The young officer rose heavily, and came at the older man's bidding. He also was very tall, and even broader-shouldered than Dr. Malinóffsky. The family resemblance was so great that Earle suddenly realized that these two men were father and son.

"Anatól—my son," announced Dr. Malinóffsky, by way of introduction. "Anatól, this is Monsieur Earle," he said briefly, not bothering with further explanation. "He has a letter for Piótr Samóilovich. Take him up across the square, and show him the villa."

With no abatement of his gloom the young officer shook hands with Earle.

"Let's go," he said, in his deep bass.

"Lunch is at one o'clock," added Dr. Malinóffsky, as Earle took his departure. "We like punctuality, but with our Russian character——" he made a pessimistic gesture with his hand.

4

Anatól Malinóffsky, big and powerful in his yellow uniform, was already striding ahead. Earle followed him across the terrace, conscious again of the many pairs of eyes—especially women's eyes—that followed him as he went. He caught up with the young officer near the gate, and made an attempt to talk with him. It was only an attempt, for the gloom and reticence of this scion of the Malinóffsky family seemed impenetrable.

"I see that you are an officer in the Russian Army," he began.

"I am in the Army," was the brief reply.

"I judge, from your uniform, that you are in the Medical Service."

"A surgeon. . . ."

"Where are you stationed?"

"At Warsaw."

Earle gave it up. This young military surgeon, it was clear, was disinclined to talk. Earle believed in letting people alone. As Evgénia Yermoláevna would have expressed it, he didn't want to talk, and that was an end to it.

Anatól led the American up the grassy street to the end of the hedge, turned to the left, and crossed over. Earle recognized this large, grassy square, saw his own villa, and beheld the steppe across which he had plodded for so many burning days. The steppe—rich with all the accumulated associations of Russian history and Russian literature. . . . He stopped for a moment on the edge of the gigantic plain, brown and undulating, scorched by the fierce, hot glare of the flaming ball above. It seemed like a dream, the memory of how, dressed in peasant garb, with a knapsack on his back and a stout stick to keep off the fierce wolf-dogs that set on him at every isolated hamlet he passed, he had tramped through the heat over the pentless expanse, and often cursed the day, the hour and the minute when the fantastic notion to cross the Don steppe afoot in midsummer had occurred to him. . . .

Often—he remembered—when the blue night had crept on

with silent feet and wrapped the vast land-ocean in purpling gloom, when the intense heat of the tormented earth had been cooled by a fresh breeze before which flew little balls of flax, and the splukers sent forth their mournful cries, and migrant birds flew low above him, their wings irradiant with the last gleam of the departing day—he had divested himself of his heavy pack, spread his rubber poncho, taken off his dusty boots to ease his blistered feet, and enjoyed—yes, actually enjoyed—his evening repast of black bread and saffronated cucumbers, washed down with warm Crimean wine. . . . And then for the countless pipes of coarse *makhórka*,¹ puffing away, as he watched the red moon rise big and round on the deep horizon, change to gleaming silver, and finally become veiled in gathering mist. . . .

Those had been the moments, such as he had always experienced when he had been alone with Nature, meditating solitary beneath a vast, star-studded sky, thinking of all his past life, of his pilgrimage on an endless road strewn with red flowers, which faded and withered behind him, and ever lured before. . . . Red flowers, with sharp thorns.

A deep voice aroused him from his absorption. A hundred feet ahead, Anatól stood and glowered.

"I am waiting!"

"Coming!" called back Earle. He gave himself a little shake, and followed his gloomy and impatient guide, who led him for a short distance along the steppe road, and stopped before a villa like all the others, except that it had thick blue-striped awnings to keep off the glare of the sun.

"Up there," growled Anatól, with a gesture. "*Proshchdetè!*" (Farewell.) He turned abruptly on his heel, and departed, big and gloomy, an unknown world.

"My heaven, what a bear!" muttered Earle, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he went slowly up the steps of the Daníloff villa.

5

At the top of the steps he paused, noting a group of people gathered around a long table, on which gleamed a steaming samovár. They all looked up as he arrived, and a blond woman rose and came to him. She was of medium height, and yet gave one an impression of being tall, in her clinging dress of white. . . . A fair and rather pretty face, with deep brown

¹ A coarse brand of tobacco.

eyes, almost amber in hue, a slightly uptilted nose and a very self-possessed and rather cynical air.

"*Zdrástè!*"¹ she greeted, with a slight smile.

"*Zdrástè!*" rejoined Earle, removing his Panama, and bowing. Then, in answer to her interrogative air, he took out the letter which he bore. . . .

"I came to present a letter to Piótr Samóilovich Daníloff," he explained. "Is he in?"

"Yes," replied the blond woman. She turned her small and shapely head.

"Father," she called. "This gentlemen has a letter for you."

A stout man of about sixty, dressed in yellow linen, rose heavily from the table, knocking over a chair which a dark-eyed, tall young girl picked up with an impatient exclamation. He walked, or rather waddled ponderously forward. His face was red, extraordinarily wide and round; his eyes were blue and prominent; he wore a gray, drooping mustache, and displayed a triple chin and an enormous stomach, which pushed out, like a big padded pillow, a capacious waistcoat of white piquet, two of the buttons of which his plethora of flesh had burst away.

"You have a letter for me?" he asked, in loud, asthmatic tones.

"Yes." Earle handed the big man the letter. Daníloff tore open the square envelope, took out the letter, and read it through, round-eyed and solemn, with stertorous breathings. When he came to the end of it, he looked up, and with great heartiness offered the visitor a fat and pudgy hand.

"I am very glad, Monsú . . . what is the name?—Monsú E-árl. . . ."

"Earle," corrected the visitor, with a smile.

"Monsú Airl, then—I am delighted to make your acquaintance and to welcome you to Slaviánsk. . . . Any friend of my friends is assured of a hearty greeting in our home. . . ."

He turned about ponderously, and addressed the group, which Earle now perceived was composed of a middle-aged, rather quiet-looking gentleman with a closely clipped gray mustache and imperial; the tall, dark-eyed girl who had picked up the chair; a gaunt and sallow youth in a blue student's uniform, and two young children, a boy and a girl.

"Listen, *gospodá!*"² he cried, in a voice of thunder. "This

¹ Greeting.

² People.

gentleman is an American, sent to us by Father Seraphím. . . . Be seated, Meester Airl!" he roared, as he seized the American by the arm and literally dragged him to the table. "*Gospoddá*, I present Meester Stepán Airl, writer, traveler, linguist, cosmopolitan. . . ."

"An American!" came the family chorus.

"At your service!" Earle smiled humorously. "I will say at once that I am called Stepán Geórgevich in Russian."

"Convenient to know!" bellowed Piótr Samóilovich. "Convenient to know! It's always a task to know what to call foreigners in this country. . . . Monsú this, and Madame that, and Mademoiselle another, and the devil knows what. . . . Stepán Geórgevich, allow me to present you to my married daughter, Vera (the pretty, blond woman smiled graciously, and gave the American her hand, as did all the others in turn as he went round the circle); M. de Marly, my son-in-law—(the quiet gentleman with the gray mustache and imperial shook Earle's hand courteously, but without a smile); my younger daughter Nadiézhda (the tall girl, with the dark eyes); my son Sáscha (the young student), and lastly my daughter's children, Lólia and Zhénia." (The little girl, who seemed to be about six years old and who had two brown pigtailed down her back, and deep brown eyes like her mother, got up and curtsied; the little boy, who seemed to be about two years older, and had big black eyes, merely looked curious, and became sullen when Nadiézhda spoke to him sharply, and made him rise and bow, which he did with a very bad grace.)

"Will you have some tea and cakes?" asked Vera de Marly, as she reached for a glass and saucer.

"With pleasure." Earle settled down in the chair which Daníloff drew up between himself and Vera, who sat at the end of the table before the samovár.

"Father Seraphím speaks very highly of you, Meester Airl," remarked Daníloff in his stentorian tones. "He seems to be very fond of you. How—may I ask—did you make his acquaintance?"

"That is a whole story," replied Earle, as he lighted a cigarette. The company looked at him with interest. What they saw was a well-set-up, broad-shouldered man who looked to be about thirty-five, with a leonine cast of countenance, a high brow, eyes of a deep, dark blue, intensely burning, and a straight, almost Grecian nose; the mouth and chin were hidden by a luxuriant blond beard with golden reflections. . . . As Dr. Malinóffsky had noted, the American's face was deeply tanned.

"I met Father Seraphím on a steamer of the Russo-Asiatic Line," he continued, as they all looked at him expectantly. "I had paid a short visit to America to look after the American rights of a book I had published in London. A tragedy occurred on board—a woman in the steerage threw herself overboard. She left a little girl child whom Father Seraphím baptized on board. He chose me as one of the sponsors."

"How pathetic!" exclaimed Nadiézhda, compassionately.

"Very sad," commented Vera, composedly, as she nibbled at a cherry.

"An extraordinary tale!" thundered Daníloff. "An extraordinary tale!"

"Frightfully sad," repeated Vera, with no exterior expression of sorrow.

"*Très-triste*," commented M. de Marly, with a species of calm and philosophic detachment.

"So that is how I met Father Seraphím," added Earle.

"We knew him while we were living in Kursk," interposed Daníloff. "He was often in our house. I was very fond of him—very fond of him—though he often used to admonish me about my weaknesses. . . . But tolerant, very tolerant, and with a heart like this." He opened his big arms widely.

"He was very severe with *me*," observed Vera de Marly, with a disdainful shrug of her shapely shoulders.

"He was severe with all women!" boomed her father. "Very severe with women. . . . He told me once that they were the instruments of Satan. . . . All impure. . . . The old medieval conception prevailing in Russia to-day . . . women forbidden to visit the inner shrines of the temples, contamination, and all that. . . ."

6

While they were discoursing, Earle had been gazing, beyond the long table, through the open space between the striped awning and the balustrade. He could see the steppe, stretching widely and levelly to the far horizon, where brown earth and hot sky met. Nearby, there waved in the gentle breeze a wide tract of yellow wheat; around the villa the grass was spotted with the burdocks' azure stain. From time to time he threw a quietly appraising glance at those around. At Piótr Samóilovich, who aroused an inner smile; at Vera Petróvna, whose rather cynical, cold-blooded personality did not attract him; at Nadiézhda, whose type, he decided, was distinctly in-

teresting: the type one might expect to meet in Cairo or Constantinople . . . rippling raven hair, eyes of dusk amber, the nose short, and the mouth full, mobile, sensitive, burning a deep, warm red. . . . There was, he decided, something impulsive and passionate in Nadiézhda's face, which was stamped, to his observing eyes, with a complex expression of petulance, scorn, pride and discontent. Perhaps he was wrong in his deductions, but he would see: She wore a flame-colored Japanese silk, belted in loosely at the waist. A double row of corals, a golden chain and locket, a wide and massive gold bracelet on each bare arm, and several costly rings, showed in her character an unusual love of adornment.

"You may be surprised to find us before the samovár at eleven o'clock in the morning," observed Vera Petróvna graciously to Earle. "We rise very late here in Slaviánsk."

"We sleep late," wheezed her father, as he took a big slice of sausage on his plate. "A bad régime. Very bad. Bad for me. . . . Impossible to lose weight. . . . As you see—not my fault. Twenty-five versts a day!" he bellowed, till the very glasses vibrated—"around the Park fifty-two times, then at the Bathing Pavilion I weigh myself. . . . Three and a half pounds more than before. . . . Word of honor! Astounding—absolutely astounding!"

"What does Dr. Malinóffsky say?" asked Vera, as she passed more tea to Earle, and placed cakes and honey within his reach.

Piótr Samóilovich became emphatic. The organ which served him as a voice might also have served for the venting of an infuriated bull's rage. All Russians, Earle had discovered, talked loudly; it seemed to be a matter of temperament, if not of culture. Some were much louder than others, however; of such were Evgénia and Piótr Samóilovich. Daniloff was certainly exceptional in this regard. To hear him one would have thought him a general roaring out orders to an army in rout. In stormy gusts he poured forth his woes and tribulations, and finally answered the question.

"Dr. Malinóffsky says I must exercise continuously, under penalty of dropping in my tracks with an apoplectic seizure. . . . Pleasing, eh?"

"Why doesn't he tell you the simple truth?" asked Nadiézhda, in her cool, incisive voice, with a tone so closely bordering on contempt that her father gazed at her uncomfortably.

"The simple truth?" he blustered. "The simple truth? Tell me the simple truth?"

"Yes," replied Nadiézhda coolly, as she took some black cherries from the plate before her. "That you are greedy, and eat too much."

"Naddi!" cried her sister severely; but Nadiézhda remained quite unmoved.

"I eat like all other men," vociferated Piótr Samóilovich deprecatingly. "Until I feel satisfaction."

"Why not be frank, Papa, and honest with yourself?" returned Nadiézhda, pursuing the attack. "You, like many other men of your age, have become the slave of your stomach, and your physician should tell you so."

"Tell me so? Tell me so? My physician should tell me so?" roared her father. "He *has* told me so, many times, from the very start! And I have tried. But it's no use. I try, my word of honor, I try every day. Every morning I resolve that I will eat less; that I will become a Spartan. To-day, I say to myself, I will do without my green Parmesan cheese at breakfast, without my *kolbassá*; ¹ I will take only one glass of coffee. And I feel virtuous, like the philosophers of old. . . . Then, when I sit down to table, all my resolutions seem eccentric, wild, preposterous. My breakfast, as I have had it for thirty years, is as much of a necessity to me as my eight hours' sleep at night. And my stoicism vanishes into thin air. I eat and drink my fill. Then afterward I feel regret. I realize that I was weak. I resolve that I will make up for it at luncheon. At luncheon, I am even weaker than in the morning; hungrier, I suppose——"

"And at dinner in the evening," finished Nadiézhda maliciously, "you eat and drink like a certain domestic animal which I need not name!"

"Yes," admitted humbly the indicted, crestfallen one. "Accursed weakness of the flesh!"

His red, enormous face, beset with a piteous expression, the almost childish chagrin of his big and prominent blue eyes, produced an effect so indescribably comic, that both Nadiézhda and Vera burst out laughing; the American and even the taciturn Sasha smiled. Monsieur de Marly was the only member of the family group who did not join in the general merriment.

Monsieur de Marly gazed with pale, far-away eyes, across the steppe, at the vast curve of earth and sky. A gray-haired, aristocratic man, every feature of whose face told the tale of ancestry and breeding; the high, white forehead, the detached gaze of the cold, gray eyes, the finely molded nose, the thin grave

¹ Sausage.

lines of the mouth beneath its covering of close clipped gray. The family history of the de Marlys, Earle learned later, went back to feudal Normandy; their race had been an aristocratic race. Now, when banking, mining and speculation had replaced the knight's belt and sword, it was aristocratic still.

"They say that Dr. Malinóffsky is, in general, too easy-going with his patients," observed Sasha. His voice was thin and colorless, like his outward personality.

"Who says so?" Vera's spirit of contradiction was evidently aroused by Nadiézhda's cavalier criticism of their father. In the Daniloff-de Marly family, it developed afterward, whenever conflicts occurred, the combatant elements resolved themselves into two definitely constituted groups, Nadiézhda and Sasha on one side, Piótr Samóilovich and Vera on the other. M. de Marly was always neutral.

"I have heard it from several," responded her brother coldly.

"It is a pity that he cannot distribute his indulgence better," remarked Nadiézhda significantly, as she pushed her glass over toward Vera to be filled.

All looked at her for a gloss to an observation evidently incomplete. Vera frowned and pushed the refilled glass back to her so quickly that the tea surged over the edge of the glass and spilled into the saucer.

"The way he treats his son Anatól is simply shameful," added Nadiézhda by way of explanation, as she sweetened her tea.

"True!" confirmed Sasha.

A glow of anger dawned in Vera Petróvna's pale cheeks.

"Before a young girl of twenty-four and a boy of twenty-six begin to criticize an old man of sixty, and especially an old man like Dr. Malinóffsky, they ought to know their facts!"

"We *know* them!" asserted Nadiézhda, her voice hardening.

"You do *not* know them!" came the flat contradiction. "Anatól is a wild and reckless boy who needs severity. What do *you* understand of a father's duty to his son?"

"As much as you, and perhaps more!" flashed back Nadiézhda, with sudden irritation. "Since he came here from Warsaw, Anatól has told me many things. The treatment that he gets in his own house is shameful. His mother hardly talks to him, except to scold; his sister Mússia quarrels with him every moment, then both she and Ekaterína Ivánovna go to his father and complain, and Borís Vladímirovich gets all stirred up against him, and reprimands and storms at him. A fine vacation the poor boy is having, after his hard work in Warsaw!"

"How does he like his position in the army?" asked M. de Marly smoothly, to divert the storm he saw brewing in Vera's angry eyes.

"I understand that his position in Warsaw is a bad one for him." Nadiézhda suddenly grew noncommittal. "He is on sick leave now."

"He spends all his time and all his money gambling with the army officers at the Military Club," put in Vera, spitefully. "And he has a perfectly *vile* temper! Mússia told me all about it. In his six years of service he has simply become a brute. Before he finished the Medical Academy, at least, he had something nice about him, something sweet and boyish. Now he goes about like a big, hulking, surly animal, hardly speaking to any one; he doesn't talk, when he condescends to speak at all, he growls!"

The lightnings flashed in Nadiézhda's ardent gaze.

"Perhaps, if you lived in his family and were in his position, you would not feel like talking either. He doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve, like some people I know, if that is what you mean. . . . He's big and deep like Eléna, and his father. And very sensitive."

"Oh! if you admire him so much," retorted Vera, not without malice, "why don't you marry him? Or hasn't he asked you?"

A sudden flush suffused the pale olive of Nadiézhda's cheeks. She found no answer for a moment, and looked away from Earle's discreetly interested gaze.

"He's deep, like Eléna," she went on, after a moment, deciding to ignore the thrust.

"Eléna, indeed!" countered Vera immediately. "How do you make *that* out? Eléna has no character whatsoever; she is as bovine and contemplative as those cows grazing out yonder in the steppe."

"She is nothing of the kind!" contradicted Nadiézhda, again aroused. "You think just because Grigóri—" She stopped short, as she caught M. de Marly's cold gaze upon her face. "What I wanted to say was that Eléna is a thinker and a dreamer, like her father; as noble too. She has a whole inner life. But she doesn't show it to every one. As to her character, it is quite the reverse of weak or bovine; it is strong, and rich, and passionate, only she has an outer reserve which misleads people who do not know her well."

"Quite so," assented M. de Marly, unexpectedly. "Eléna

Borísovna has personality. Physically I consider her very charming."

"She is *beautiful*!" declared Nadiézhda with enthusiasm.

"The beauty of a ruminating animal!" rejoined Vera, with obstinacy and spite. "Pink and white and plump; it is not interesting. I have always been surprised——"

"At what?" prompted Nadiézhda, as Vera stopped short.

"Nothing!" Vera poured herself another glass of tea.

"Her sister Liubóff is a very remarkable woman." M. de Marly gazed contemplatively at the single diamond that glittered on his white and shapely hand. "She is the only woman-Professor in Russia," he explained to Earle, "at the People's University, in Moscow, you know. Shákhoff, the millionaire, founded her chair himself. She was telling me the other day about her law-course in Germany, and how difficult she found it to gain admittance to the Faculty of Jura in Berlin. Even after she succeeded in persuading the Herr Rektor to admit her, she had to endure many affronts from the German students, who resented the admission of a woman to the Jura course.

"Once she came in five minutes late (it was, I believe, a lecture on Criminal Law), and all the students in the big hall, six hundred strong, stamped so that the whole building shook, as she walked up to the front, the professor, meanwhile, unable to say a word. When she finally reached her seat she found it occupied by an enormous student, a regular beer-barrel, with a slash on his face from eye to chin.

"*'Entschuldigen Sie!'*" she said, by no means humbly,—Liubóff Borísovna, as you know—*'Ich glaube, dies ist mein Platz!'*¹ And the brute just looked up at her and smiled insolently in her very face, and all flushed and resentful, she turned and started to leave the hall. At that psychological moment she met her future husband."

"Sergiéi Dmítrich?" exclaimed Nadiézhda and Vera both together, with interest. They had known that Liubóff Borísovna had first become acquainted with her husband in Germany, but they had never heard the details of their meeting.

"Yes, Sergiéi Dmítrich. He leaped to his feet and offered her his own seat. When he walked to the back of the auditorium to find a vacant seat, he was roundly hissed by the entire hall."

"German chivalry!" commented Vera, with contempt.

"If a woman insists on thrusting herself among men where

¹Excuse me. I believe this is my seat.

she is not wanted," objected Nadiézhda, "she must be prepared to stand the consequences."

"Very unhappy consequences for her," added Sasha in his thin, cold voice. "She adored him, they say, and now she is grieving her heart out over his death."

"What did he die of? What did he die of?" vociferated Daníloff, unbuttoning at the bottom his expansive vest of white piqué, and settling back ponderously in his chair with a wheezing sigh of plenary satisfaction.

"Who? Sergiéi Dmítrich? Some nervous affection of the heart, so Anatól told me."

"Alas, poor Russia!" said M. de Marly, politely offering his father-in-law a cigarette. "Seven out of every ten are nervous wrecks. That poor boy yesterday, for instance——"

"You refer to the assassination?" asked Earle.

"Yes."

"I was sitting on the same bench with that Gendarme Captain when he was shot," Earle added.

"*V sámon diéliè!*" (You don't say so!) exclaimed Vera and Nadiézhda both together.

"Weren't you frightened?" probed Daníloff.

"Startled!" admitted Earle.

"As to the boy who shot Liútin, of course he was a neurasthenic," declared Daníloff. "We are all neurasthenics. How could it be otherwise, with the life we lead? It breaks us in our youth, and we never get over the effect of it. Visits at midnight, home at the dawning, cards, and drink, and tobacco, our national vice! Who was it said that Youth is a disease? If I hadn't been a hearty eater, I should have been dead and buried long ago!"

This last ingenious defence by Piótr Samóilovich of his besetting sin, was greeted with more hilarity.

"The longer I live in Russia, and the more I study the Russian character," observed M. de Marly, reflectively, "the more I am inclined to think that the life of Russia is not a cause, but an effect."

"Of what?" asked the American at once, casting at de Marly a quick, interested glance.

"The disease lies within, not without," replied de Marly, calmly, in his polished, slightly foreign intonation.

He lighted, as he spoke, a long-stemmed cigarette, blowing out the smoke in an extended narrow spiral.

"There are certainly plenty of nervous wrecks in Russia,"

assented Nadiézhda. "To say nothing of the Vermoláeffs themselves, take Madame Lébedeff, the *pomiéshchitsa*¹ staying with them, for instance, with her wholesale display of diamonds on every finger of each hand, and her exaggerated fears of disease germs from the floors."

"Is that why she sits all doubled up upon her chair?" asked Sasha, with his pale smile.

"Yes!" confirmed Nadiézhda immediately. "And wherever you look it's just the same. The Gavrilkos, for instance. The Prokurór (Prosecuting Attorney) is like a madman. And his wife is insanely jealous."

"It's pitiful—the way they treat their child," Sasha chimed in.

"When you are the father of small children yourself," Vera remarked sarcastically to Sasha, ignoring her sister deliberately, "we shall be edified by observing how you treat them."

He cast at her a glance of cold dislike.

"Perhaps I shall treat them as well as you do your own," he answered, with a contempt so undisguised that de Marly looked up sharply.

Vera's bosom was heaving and her brown eyes flashing. At that moment steps were heard on the back piazza. The maid came to announce the visit of Matviéi de Basilídes, who—as Nadiézhda hastily explained, was a Greek, a composer by profession, from Rostóff—a widower—who lived with his children in his mother's villa not far away.

7

Matviéi de Basilídes—Stomátevich his patronymic—was a small, dark, slender man, well over fifty, though his hair and beard were only just beginning to turn gray. The concentrated flame of intelligence burned in his dark eyes. In every feature, line and gesture, de Basilídes, like his friend de Marly, betrayed race.

He kissed Vera's hand, bowed generally to all the others, and sat down at the table, but declined Vera's offer of tea. Vera introduced him and Earle. De Basilídes acknowledged the introduction nonchalantly, with the self-possessed and finished air of a man of the world. He was urbane, courteously indifferent to the apparently phenomenal fact that Earle was an American, and showed himself a master of the social art of simulating interest where he felt none.

¹ Owner of a landed estate, fem.

In the light, casual conversation which he launched with M. de Marly and Vera in French he showed a linguistic facility which the American, who was sensitive to such matters, found quite admirable. His accent and command of idiom were so perfect that Earle, who had spoken French since his childhood, was moved to ask in French:

"Monsieur is French?"

"*Nong!*" bellowed Piótr Samóilovich for him, in the vilest of Russian-French accents. "*Monsú de Basilídes est Grec, d'oune vielye famílye historíque—famílye ro-yale, n'est-ce pas, Matviéi Stomátevich?*"¹

"Our family has its traditions," replied de Basilídes, his nonchalance yielding to a sentiment of quiet pride. "Some of our ancestors were closely related to the reigning house of Greece. My great-grandfather played an important part in the war of Independence, by which Greece regained her liberty from the Turks. . . . As you see," he added, with a smile to Earle, "we have traditions."

"I see." The American looked interested. "I wish sometime you would tell me more about your family. I have been in Greece myself, and even speak a little modern Greek."

"Really?" De Basilídes shifted suddenly into sonorous Greek. "How long did you stay in Greece?" he asked.

"About three months," replied Earle, with but a moment's hesitation.

"Where were you?"

"In Macedonia, partly. I also spent some time in Athens, and visited Crete and the Dodecanesus."

"How do you like Greek life?"

"I like it. There is something in the Greek mind—a sense of harmony and sanity—which I admire."

De Basilídes looked pleased.

"You are right. It exists. Quite different from the Russians——"

He broke off suddenly, and made courteous apologies to the company, who had been listening to this unintelligible abracadabra with expectant smiles.

"Forgive me for lapsing into my native idiom for a moment," he apologized. "I was curious to see how this gentleman spoke Greek."

"And how?" queried Vera.

¹ M. de Basilídes is Greek, of an old historic family—a royal family, isn't it?

"Quite well," replied M. de Basilides. "Considering the difficulty of modern Greek, surprisingly well."

"And Russian, too," observed M. de Marly, breaking a long silence. "And French, my own language also, it seems."

"How many languages *do* you speak?" Vera was evidently impressed.

"About a dozen," replied Earle briefly. "I have traveled about Europe a great deal in the last ten years," he explained. "Of course, I read many more than I speak."

"A linguistic Leviathan!" roared Daniloff. "A linguistic Leviathan!"

"How can you have the patience?" asked Nadiézhda wonderingly.

"I like languages."

"*Gospodá!*" interposed de Basilides, at this juncture. "One of the reasons why I came this morning was to ask if you are all going to Sviatiya Góry to-morrow."

"Of course we're going!" replied Vera de Marly. Earle thought he noted a touch of sharpness in her manner toward the Greek. "The greatest event of the season, aside from the unparalleled Slaviánsk ball—do you think we would miss it?"

"I asked," continued de Basilides imperturbably, "because the Yermoláeffs are planning a whole excursion with their cottagers, and as we also are going, it occurred to me that we might all go together. Evgénia, as you know, is the life of any party."

"She is extremely coarse and common!" cut in Vera, with a disdainful shrug.

"But very amusing, as Matviéi says," countered M. de Marly. "And a wonderful organizer! I have seen her in action—a veritable Field-Marshal!"

Earle smiled as he remembered how Evgénia had charged across the square.

"Where is Sviatiya Góry?" he asked aside of Nadiézhda. "And what is going on there?"

Nadiézhda turned on him the resplendency of her magnificent dark eyes. How resplendent they were, and yet how velvety soft and languorous. This girl was very beautiful. . . . Slaviánsk, it seemed, was full of beautiful women. He looked so intently into her eyes, as she replied to his question, that she became aware of his insistent gaze, and lowered her long black lashes for a moment, and a slight tinge of color mantled the dark pallor of her cheeks.

"Sviatiya Góry—*les Montagnes Saintes*," she explained, "is

the name of a beautiful spot about twenty versts from here, in the Khárkoff 'Government.' A large and very ancient Monastery is situated there. Once every year the Monks throw it open as a place of pilgrimage. Thousands of people, mostly peasants, flock there from all parts of Russia. Our Russian people are very religious, you know," she added.

"A religious pilgrimage!" exclaimed Earle, with sudden animation. "That savors of the Middle Ages. It must be fascinating!"

"It's interesting," conceded Nadiézhda, with no special enthusiasm. "Religious festivals never appealed to me very much. It's always so hot, and the crowd is terrible. Of course, I've seen the *Khréstny Khod* twice before."

"What is the *Khréstny Khod*?"

"The procession of the Cross," translated Nadiézhda, in the ever-convenient French. "It's the great culmination of the religious ceremonies. They carry the big Cross with the holy banners to the Holy Place—up the river. Why don't you go yourself to see it?"

"I'd like to——" The American hesitated.

"You can go with us," offered Nadiézhda, reading his thoughts, and with the subtlest touch of clandestinity in the softening and lowering of her rich contralto voice.

"I should be delighted to go—with *you*." Earle also lowered his voice, and gazed intently into her eyes. Nadiézhda suddenly laughed, and put a white and shapely hand, covered with jewels, before her eyes.

"Don't stare at me so. You burn me!" she murmured, with a swift glance aside to see if any one was observing this by-play. Catching Vera's cold and critical eye, she called aloud to the family group, to save the situation:

"*Gospodd!* Meester Airl is going with us to Sviatíya Góry."

"Good!" came the general chorus. "The more, the merrier!"

"It will be a noteworthy experience for you, Monsieur," remarked M. de Marly. "Especially if you are interested in religion."

"I am," Earle answered, to the somewhat mocking inflection of de Marly's clear, calm voice. "I'm not a believer in a religion, but it has interested me all my life."

"Not a believer?" echoed Vera, challengingly. "I assume you don't deny that there are mysteries."

"The mysterious mysteries!" commented her husband aside, raising his aristocratic shoulders. Earle noticed that Vera's brown eyes again flashed angrily, but she made no comment.

"*Gospoddi!*" intervened Matviéi Stomátevich, looking at his watch. "It is half past ten, and we are losing a beautiful morning. I propose that we all go down to the Park for a little stroll. I, for one, should like to have a swim in the Lake, even if it is only a short one."

"I also," Earle chimed in.

"Do you like the water?" asked Vera.

"I do not merely like it—I can't live without it. I have just come from Yalta,¹ you know."

"Is that where you got so sun-burned?" asked Daniloff. "You look—pardon the comparison—like one of the Aborigines of your native land."

"No. I got that walking across the Don steppe."

"Walking across the steppe!" they cried in amazement.

"Across the steppe in midsummer?" said M. de Marly, raising his eyebrows.

"Across the steppe in June? You must be crazy!" commented Vera sharply.

"You are at liberty to think so." Earle's manner underwent an imperceptible change; a coldness came into his tone which Vera immediately sensed. He turned from her suddenly, and addressed the others.

"It was an idea of mine. Dressed as a peasant in a red blouse and big boots, and armed with a stout stick and a revolver, I tramped it across, and now that it's over, I'm rather glad I did it."

"It must have been intensely hot." Over the lips of M. de Marly flickered a cold, slightly mocking smile.

"I was on the point of having a sunstroke several times," admitted Earle with composure.

"But why did you do it?" asked Vera.

Earle turned his eyes upon her fair and pretty face.

"For reasons that you would be unable to comprehend." He spoke slowly and deliberately.

"Indeed!" Vera rose suddenly, with a defiant and ironical fling of her blond head. "I think I'll go and get my hat. Coming, Naddi?"

"In a moment."

Nadiézhda lingered till Vera had disappeared.

"But really, why *did* you do it?" she asked persuasively. She lowered her voice again. . . . "You'll tell *me*, won't you?"

"Romanticism!" was the American's only answer, as he rose

¹ A famous watering place in the Crimea.

with the others in the general exodus. Baffled, yet smiling in reply to the smile in his eyes, Nadiézhda went to join her sister.

They all left together a few moments later. Earle chose Nadiézhda to walk with; Nadiézhda, indeed, expected it, for she lingered behind in clear invitation.

"Where are you going to stay?" she asked, as they crossed the grassy square and entered through a small stile gate into the green and shady Park.

"I have already taken one of Evgénia Yermoláevna's villas. I shall eat at the Sanatorium."

"At the Sanatorium!" Nadiézhda looked suddenly discomposed, and gazed at him oddly.

"I'm sorry we talked so freely about the Malinóffskys," she admitted frankly in response to his question. "Somehow we didn't realize . . . we supposed you were merely passing. . . . I trust . . ."

"I never tell tales," rejoined the American briefly. "I despise gossip and tittle-tattle. Personally I like Dr. Malinóffsky and Ekaterína Ivánovna. The others I have not met. Yes, Dr. Malinóffsky's son, what is his name? Anatól . . . he brought me to your villa."

"I suppose you didn't like *him*," commented Nadiézhda, lowering her head, as they walked slowly after the others.

"I might like him. . . . I can't say. . . . He obstinately refused to talk. . . . He seems to be in a very gloomy mood."

"You heard what was said of him a few moments ago," Nadiézhda added. "Poor boy: I am so sorry for him. . . ."

She said nothing more, and Earle was discreetly silent.

"And Eléna—have you met her yet?"

"No. I suppose you mean Dr. Malinóffsky's daughter."

"You will love her when you do!" prophesied Nadiézhda, with conviction.

"I hope not." Earle evaded her curious, laughing gaze, as they approached the entrance to the Park's inner shrine.

Nadiézhda showed a season ticket. Earle paid his fee. The others came behind them. After the whole party had passed in, they crossed a stream of people going out.

Earle heard the clear soprano voice of Vera behind him.

"Grigóri Maksímich, wait! . . . I have something to ask you!"

He turned, just in time to see Vera running after a tall, fair young man—very slim and elegant in white linen and with a light cane—who turned and came to meet her. Earle saw them meet, exchange a few words, then turn again and walk off

slowly together. He also saw that she did not even wave a farewell to her husband, who, with M. de Basilides, had waited a moment, and who now continued his way. Earle noticed lastly that on M. de Marly's calm face there was the faintest trace of a smile, and that his friend, M. de Basilides, looked at him oddly as he smiled.

CHAPTER III

I

SO Stephen Earle, dressed like an English gentleman, and accompanied by a full half dozen new-found friends, entered again the Park where only the day before he had sat in peasant garb, dog-weary, friendless and alone.

He was intensely interested in the scene which unrolled itself before his eyes. The day before, all that he had seen, or rather sensed, had been the ceaseless rustle of green, breeze-swept foliage, the checker-board of brown paths, the inevitable Kursal, the wide esplanade and proscenium from which came the lively harmonies of the summer band. Now he could study both the scene and the people in their details, as he strolled slowly back and forth with Nadiézhda. The latter, who had constituted herself his guide and mentor, every few moments raised her lorgnette, mounted on a long black handle, to gaze at some woman acquaintance or at a pretty toilette, or at some interesting-looking man who passed and bowed.

It was a bright summer morning. . . . The air, cooled from an early morning shower, fanned the face pleasantly; the clear, golden sunlight glinted through the sighing leaves of the high trees, playing hide-and-seek on the smooth sand promenade.

The proscenium was a hollow shell of scrolled yellow wood, within which a full half-hundred musicians, attired in gayly colored blouses, crouched over their instruments. These spoke and answered, dualed and tripled, wove an intricate web of harmony, a throb and rhythm which cast an atmosphere of enchantment and irreality over all the gay and animated meanderings of the promenaders through the sunlit, green-encompassed paths.

This, decided Earle, was an environment of light and love and laughter, of careless happiness, of frivolous existence, frothy as foam, vanishing each night in gayly-colored, iridescent bubbles, reappearing as flimsy and iridescent on the surface of each new day.

In the middle of the Plaza rose the high, white Kursal, with oblong sides, each of which was flanked by a wide, roofed-in piazza. Three gracefully curving flights of yellow stairs led up to a semicircular façade. From a tall, tapering mast above the hollow dome, the red-blue-white of the Russian imperial flag flirted fitfully with the equally capricious breeze.

A wide, sanded esplanade ran directly to the Lake, some thousand rods away. On either side of this esplanade ranged a multiplicity of green-painted benches, every one of which was crowded with people. Crowded also were the "auditorium" benches, placed in even rows before the proscenium. At the right the eye seized first the gaudy colors of the Caucasian toy-shops, then the vistas of deep green amidst which, in the distance, luminously shone forth the bands of blue lake-water, bordered with lighter green. And in the wide central path flowed by, like a never-ceasing river, the eternal Promenade.

Truly, as Dr. Malinófsky had said, a heterogeneous and conglomerate collection. Long-haired, bearded "popes" (priests) in their yellow cassocks, wearing upon their breasts the heavy gold-bronze crucifix of the Orthodox church. Whole groups of daintily dressed women in white, their thickly powdered faces shining through lace veils, tenuously fluttering scarves, Chinese, sky-blue, draped artistically over head and shoulders, and falling far below the knee; the vivid sunlight reveals the secret that they wear no underskirts. Well-dressed gentlemen alternating with rustic landed-proprietors, in saffron frock-coats and half-boots, and with whole regiments of students and diminutive school-boys, all wearing their distinctive uniforms.

Uniforms, uniforms everywhere: Government officials, in white caps and gold-buttoned jackets; gendarmes and officers of chic regiments with clinking sabers and spurs and gray cloaks falling gracefully from their shoulders; junkers from some military school, yellow-jacketed, correctly booted, black-belted, red-epauletted. A gaudy General passes, perhaps the same one Earle had seen the day before: a mottled, scarlet, apoplectic countenance, vitiated by old age, high living, over-indulgence; a nose so bibulous, bulbous and excrescent as to be impossible.

But, above all, ladies, ladies everywhere, all garbed in fluffy white. Lithe, cold bodies, just out of the Lake, slipped into loose and vaporous morning-dresses, into cobwebby silk stockings and high-heeled shoes. Gracefully they walked and gossiped, laughed and flirted, their eyes shining lustrously through the lacy shimmer of their veils. . . .

So they promenaded, the motley, intricately mingled throng—Jews and Gentiles, Slavs and Germans and Caucasians, nobles, priests and peasants—and their steps, and even their very words, seemed to be set to the magic rhythm of the march which the orchestra, guided by the imperious baton of the black-clad leader, bowed, blew, fluted, oboed, drummed and brazenly thundered forth.

From time to time, as they passed certain groups, Nadiézhda, after exchanging greetings, told Earle who some of the people were. Others she pointed out with a frankness of comment which the American had already noted at the Daníloff villa, and which he found amusing.

That group standing yonder near the Kursal steps was an interesting combination. The pale, strange-looking woman was a psychopath—quite abnormal; Mária Aleksíevna Lébedeff, her name was. . . . Yes, they had mentioned her at the villa. She wore, Earle noted, an enormous head-dress—it could hardly be called a hat—made to resemble a silver butterfly and star combined. . . . The tall, thin man dressed in a white gendarme uniform—the long frock coat, set off by a double row of gilt buttons—was her husband, the *Zémsky Nachdlnik*.¹ Earle beheld clearly his grim, sallow face, his cold and steely gaze, his upturned nose and drooping red mustachios. Engaged with these people in conversation were the Gavrilkos.

Gavrilko was Prokurór (Prosecuting Attorney of the Crown) at Khárkoff. He was, declared Nadiézhda again decisively, absolutely insane. Earle looked at him with interest. He saw a man of medium height, about forty years of age, yellow of countenance, with a closely shaven head, sparkling black eyes, and a small, wiry black mustache and lower lip imperial. The Prokurór wore a short, green, gold-buttoned jacket and green visored cap—another uniform. His wife, a thin, sharp-looking woman, was dressed in blue silk, and wore a white-plumed hat. These two groups, explained Nadiézhda cautiously, behind her hand, as they passed, were of the same world—the world of bureaucracy, bullets and Black Hundreds.

Face to face they met a short, dark-faced, pudgy individual, in a white visored cap and jacket; through his black-rimmed eyeglasses, which pinched his flabby nose into a strangely convoluted shape, his small, near-sighted, pig-like eyes peered palely forth. He passed on, not recognizing Nadiézhda, a fact that caused her

¹Literally District Chief. An official who combined judicial with police functions.

apparently no regret. This, said Nadiézhda, was Vladímir Yermoláeff, son of Evgénia, and a small-pay Government veterinary by profession. It seemed to Earle that he was looking for some one in the crowd; probably, said Nadiézhda, his wife. . . . He turned off at the first path to the right, leading to the Bathing Pavilion.

On the other side of the esplanade, seated on a bench at the side, they passed Anatól Malinóffsky, straight and sturdy in his army uniform, very good-looking with his darkly-glowing eyes, his slightly aquiline nose, small brown mustache, and strongly outlined chin. . . .

A tall, aristocratic gentleman, who wore a full black beard, and who was dressed in white linen, sauntered by with a prettily dressed lady, who turned with a smile as her attention was attracted, and exchanged greetings with some one invisible. . . .

"That dark man is Prince Tatárinoff, isn't it?" asked Earle.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I met him yesterday twice; the second time in the Park."

"Yes," said Nadiézhda, "that is Prince Tatárinoff, and the woman with him is his natural daughter, Antonína, the wife of Vladímir Yermoláeff, who has just passed by."

Others strolled back and forth, engaged in animated conversation, keeping step rhythmically with the spirited strains of the music. And of every person whom she had seen and recognized and knew intimately, and of almost every other person whom she knew less closely, and who passed and greeted, Nadiézhda had some secret to tell, some dark cloud, some irregularity, some family or private scandal.

Of Mária Aleksíevna and the Nachálnik terrible things were whispered; dark rumors of things suspected, but not definitely known. She was rich; her husband had only his salary.

The Gavrílkos led a cat-and-dog life; the Prokurór had divorced his first wife to marry Natália Mikháilovna; he was a half-insane neurasthenic, and had made her one. Frightfully fond of women—his poor wife never had a moment's peace of mind.

Volódia Yermoláeff was a drunkard and débauché; he had been at the point of death three times; his main occupation consisted of bulldozing Evgénia, his mother, into giving him money.

Evgénia herself, declared Nadiézhda, in her younger days had been much courted by army officers. From Nadiézhda's amplifications of this report Earle gathered that Evgénia's youth and

married life, from an austere point of view, had not been all that they should have been.

Anatól Malinóffsky's story Nadiézhda told with unmistakable bias, repeating the tale of his miserable existence at home. From Nadiézhda's remarks, however, Earle deduced that Anatól had given his family trouble since his adolescence, and for all his twenty-six years, was still a wild and reckless boy—he had twice threatened to shoot his father, with whom, for years, he had had wild and stormy quarrels.

Prince Tatárinoff had lived for years on his mother's estate with a woman of the peasant class, whom he had never married. She had given him a daughter, Tónia, whom the Prince, with some financial inducement, had married off to Vladímir Yermoláeff, the veterinary. . . . The Prince also had a son, a lad of about seventeen, whom he had legitimized; the identity of the mother had never been established. . . . The boy was now at school in England.

So it went, the *chronique scandaleuse*—scandal to which the Russian world was wholly indifferent. Illegitimate children, wives only in name, men and women of more than dubious morality; every one received them, implied Nadiézhda in pantomime, with the Russian gesture (palm outward and downward from the shoulder) which may fairly well be said to cover a multitude of sins.

Weary at last of promenading, they sat down on one of the auditorium benches. A slight young girl with Hebraic features, and with two long black braids hanging down over her shoulders, shrank aside to make room for them, smiling timidly at Nadiézhda, who returned the smile not unkindly.

"Zdrástè, Anna Isáevna. I never fail to see you at the music."

"Zdr-r-ástè, Nadiézhda Petróvna!" The girl spoke with a vibratory roll of the r and a throaty accent which at once betrayed her race, had her profile and lustrous Oriental eyes not done so already. "As you know, I—I adore music."

"Meester Earle, let me make you acquainted with Anna Isáevna Ezrin—a new arrival from the Caucasus region," said Nadiézhda with an air of unmistakable condescension which Earle remembered afterward. "Anna Isáevna, this is Stepán Geórgévich . . . an American friend of our family, who has just come from the Crimea."

Earle acknowledged the introduction politely. Anna Isáevna, with the shrinking timidity that seemed to be habitual with her, put out her hand uncertainly, and then half withdrew it. Earle,

with his hand already out, started to draw it back just as she swiftly extended hers again, and flushed with confusion when she found his gone.

Earle suddenly laughed, a full, mellow peal of unadulterated amusement.

"*Nu*, Anna Isáevna, are we going to shake hands or not?" he demanded humorously.

"Yes. . . . Certainly," replied the little Jewess eagerly, fixing her glowing, fawnlike eyes upon his face. She put forth her hand again, and Earle pressed it heartily; he already liked this pretty, timid, shrinking Jewish maiden. Nadiézhda, who had turned around and begun to study the promenaders through her lorgnette, did not follow this little episode. Earle also turned and gazed at the proscenium for a moment. When he looked around again he found that Anna Isáevna had slipped away quietly, without a parting greeting.

"Timid!" he thought, and dismissed her from his mind.

He lighted a cigarette, crossed his knees, and listened with enjoyment to the orchestra, which had begun to play an extract from Chaikófsky's opera, *Evgény Onégin*.

"Well, Mr. American," Nadiézhda suddenly turned her gaze upon him, "you seem to be wrapped up in your thoughts."

"I was listening to the music," he explained simply.

"I am sure you were thinking of some woman," said Nadiézhda accusingly.

"I was. Of you. I imagine I was thinking of your beautiful eyes." He gazed at them with undisguised admiration.

Nadiézhda laughed merrily, by no means displeased.

"Do all Americans make compliments to the first woman they meet?" she queried.

"Yes. . . . If the first woman happens to have such beautiful eyes as you."

"You are a veritable Lovélás!" (*Lovelace*) she decided, with a little tap of her lorgnette on his arm, obvious coquetry both in her eyes and in the inflexion of her voice.

"Merely sincere!"

"Oh, there come my people, with the Basilídes!" she exclaimed, gazing beyond him. "Shall we go and join them again?"

"Why not?" asked Earle, somewhat to her chagrin.

They met the family party in the middle of the broad promenade.

"*Zdrástè!*" greeted Vera, in her light, ironical way. "Where have you two been hiding yourselves? We concluded you had

eloped. . . . Be careful, Meester Airl," she warned maliciously, "my younger sister is a charmer, famous in the musical circles of Peter and Moscow as a consummate flirt."

"Vera!" flashed back Nadiézhda, her black brows setting stormily, while white lightnings played in her dark eyes. "What will Monsieur Earle think?"

Vera smiled cynically.

"That you are a flirt, and that I know it," she deduced logically. "Don't be afraid; men like flirts, don't they, Stepán Geórgevich?"

"It depends on who does the flirting," Earle replied as they all moved off together.

"There's Eléna Malinóffsky!" said Vera suddenly. Earle, as he looked at her, was struck by her expression: it held something feline and cruel. . . . "With Grigóri Maksímich, who left me only five minutes ago. . . . Characteristic. Quite an ideal couple. . . . (Her clear, loud tones held an unmistakable sneer.)

"Paul and Virginia. A pity that Paul is not more assiduous——"

"He might be if he were left alone," interposed Nadiézhda, *sotto voce*. Vera pretended not to hear.

"Let's go over," she suggested. But her husband and M. de Basilídes had already passed on. It was clear that the doings of Vera did not interest them. Vera led the way for her sister and Earle, her father waddling ponderously in the rear, very red faced, and evidently suffering from the heat.

"Have you met Eléna yet?" asked Nadiézhda of Earle, as they crossed the esplanade. "Oh, no, I remember, you said you hadn't."

"No. She was absent this morning. . . ."

When within a few steps of the bench on which Eléna Malinóffsky sat, Earle recognized the man who sat with her as the Grigóri Maksímich whom Vera had pounced upon so uncereemoniously on their entrance into the Park.

He made a further discovery just as they arrived before the bench. Already he had recognized the deep gray eyes, burning ardently beneath the slightly slanting brows; the small and childish mouth. He also saw that she did not recognize him, and little wonder. Lastly he noted that Grigóri Maksímich, who was blond and fair, in a cold, supercilious, North Russian way, and wore a slight mustache, was frowning and sulky, and that the girl looked resentful.

"Zdrástè, Eléna!" greeted Vera sharply and clearly, as they all stopped before her. "Do I actually have the pleasure of seeing you again, Grigóri Maksímich? I have brought over our friend, Meester Stepán Geórgevich Airl, to make your acquaintance."

Carelessly she made the fitting introductions. Dodónoff, it seemed, was the family name of Grigóri Maksímich. "There, that's done. I hate introductions. Do let us sit down; I'm dying of heat." She at once followed her own suggestion, while the others remained standing.

"Monsú Airl is an American," boomed Daniloff, as he wiped his perspiring brow. "Recommended to me from the Crimea by a young priest, who used to come to us at Moscow. . . . A young priest. . . ."

"I've met you before," said Earle directly, as he gazed down into the gray eyes.

"Really?" The young girl looked puzzled and apologetic. "I'm afraid I don't remember. . . . I'm so sorry. . . ."

"I was sitting on the bench with you yesterday afternoon when that Gendarme Captain was shot."

"Sitting on the bench with me? . . . Surely not. . . . There was only a *muzhík*.¹ . . ."

"I was the *muzhík*."

She stared up into his face, amazed and incredulous.

"*Góspodi!*"² she exclaimed suddenly. "I recognize you now! But I thought you were a peasant. You were certainly dressed like one. . . . And you were all dusty, with half-boots and a flaming red blouse and a stick. . . . And you had some kind of a sack on the ground before you. . . . I can scarcely believe my own eyes! . . ."

"I had just got in from a long tramp across the steppe," Earle explained, amused by her unfeigned astonishment. "Covered with dust, and dead tired. But to-day, as you see. . . . Luckily, my trunk had arrived. . . . I sent it on weeks ago. . . ."

"This man has walked, actually walked, the whole way across the Don steppe!" exclaimed Vera. "With all the heat. . . . Just imagine!"

"*Molodiéts!*"³ commented Nadiézhda, admiringly.

"I envy him!" roared Daniloff. "If I could do that, I could walk off most of this accursed flesh!"

"You are awfully sunburned," said Eléna. "I should think you would have had a heat stroke."

"I almost did," admitted Earle patiently.

"But why did you walk across the steppe?" Eléna still looked puzzled.

¹ Peasant.

² Literally, "Lord!" Used like "*Mon dieu!*" in French.

³ An almost untranslatable noun. Here, perhaps, "amazing!"

"I can tell you why," interposed Nadiézhda maliciously. All looked at her inquiringly.

"Romanticism!" she added, with a mischievous grimace at Earle, who laughed good-humoredly.

"You have been long in Russia?" pursued Eléna. Earle noted, as he replied, that Grigóri Maksímich, who had risen on their arrival, was looking at him with unconcealed dislike.

"About a year."

"You speak Russian very well," said Eléna, gazing up at him from under slanting brows, her long, dark lashes haloing the gray and liquid brilliance of her eyes.

"He speaks every language under the sun!" put in Nadiézhda with conviction.

"Monsieur Airl is a cosmopolite," added Vera, graciously, but with the ever-vibrant note of irony which seemed to be characteristic of her. "He has traveled all over the civilized world, lived with the inhabitants of a dozen countries, adopting the language, customs and ideas of all."

Earle shrugged his shoulders slightly, but did not take the trouble to reply.

"*Góspodi*, what a complicated soul you must have!" exclaimed Eléna.

"Souls, you mean!" amended Vera, ironically.

"Souls, then," said Eléna, accepting the correction. "It must be very inconvenient. I have only one myself, and I often think that that is one too many."

"Cynicism, Eléna?" stabbed Vera promptly, the cruel smile on her lips. "I thought you had preserved all the illusions of your early youth!"

Eléna bit her lips, cast at Vera a swift, resentful gaze, and made no rejoinder. . . .

"And how do you like Russia?" she asked, addressing Earle again, evidently deciding to ignore an evident thrust.

"Which Russia, Mademoiselle?"

"Which Russia?" she repeated uncomprehendingly.

"Yes, Russia as a geographical symbol means many things."

"Explain!"

"After I had been in Petersburg a few weeks, I thought I knew Russia. Then, when I had lived in Moscow, I found there was a second Russia, perhaps a truer one. And then, when I walked down across the country, within the past few months, I learned to know another Russia still."

Eléna looked up at him inquiringly.

"A Russia," concluded Earle seriously, "which has stamped upon my mind the memory of a beautiful world. Perhaps it will be sufficient to say that I have been a whole season in the wilds, tramping or idling on the shore of the Black Sea, living on wild fruit, sleeping in the open, and swimming to my heart's content."

"How divine!" exclaimed Nadiézhda. Vera was talking aside to Grigóri. Eléna made no comment, but fixed on Earle her deep and glowing gaze. . . .

"*Gospodá!*" roared Daniloff, struggling manfully to shove his big gold watch back into the pocket of his distended waistcoat. "If you do not wish to miss the morning bath, I advise you to go to the Pavilion at once, as it is now exactly half past eleven. As for me, I am going home."

"So am I," Vera declared promptly. "I am actually too lazy to bathe."

"I'll go up with you," offered Grigóri Maksímich immediately. "I'm going to have my bath this afternoon."

"Well, as for me, I'm going to have my first swim in Slaviánsk this morning," announced Earle decisively. He came to Eléna with a smile, disclosing white and even teeth, and a sensitive and well-moulded mouth. "Are you not intending to bathe, Eléna Borísovna?"

"No," rejoined Eléna. "Not yet. . . . A little later, perhaps."

"I hope this will not be our last meeting." He took the hand she offered, and held it for a moment.

She looked up at him shyly and uncertainly and encountered the gaze of Grigóri, frowning and surprised, the mocking smile of Vera, who was watching her like a lynx.

"Tell me," she added quickly. "Where are you staying, Stepán Géorgevich?"

"I have taken a small villa belonging to Evgénia Vermoláevna. I shall eat at the Sanatorium."

"And you will stay here for some time, in Slaviánsk?"

He shook his head. "I rarely stay long in one place."

"Like the gypsy child," said Eléna.

*"Immer nur zu, immer nur zu,
Zigeunerkind hat niemals Ruh'!"*

she quoted.

"It seems so."

"I am sorry. . . . You will be here at least for a few weeks?"

"Perhaps for a month. . . . And, as I said, I hope to have an opportunity soon of talking with you again."

"I hope so," she answered frankly.

The group broke up amid general greetings, cries, invitations, recommendations. The Daniloffs, Vera and Grigóri went up the wide, tree-shaded avenue, leading to the Daniloff-de Marly villa; Vera had begun to try her wiles again on Grigóri, judging by her peals of almost continuous laughter. Her husband and the Greek composer seemed to have disappeared. Nadiézhda had lingered behind.

"I think I will bathe," she stated. "If you like, Meester Earle, I will show you the way to the Pavilion."

"That is very kind of you." Earle bowed his parting greetings to Eléna.

"See you later, Eléna dear," cried Nadiézhda. "This afternoon, perhaps——"

"Have a good bath," called back Eléna, as she rose from the bench and walked away, alone and evidently pensive, dragging the point of her parasol behind her.

"How do you like Eléna?" inquired Nadiézhda, as they started off.

"I like her," he answered briefly.

"She likes *you*."

"I hope so. . . . I imagine she . . ." He broke off suddenly. "I am sorry for her," he added, and obstinately closed his lips when Nadiézhda cast at him a swift, interrogative glance.

"Eléna is wonderful," continued Nadiézhda, loyally. "You heard what I said about her at the villa. Wait till you know her better."

The way to the Bathing Pavilion led by a wide shaded avenue, bordering the gleaming shore; the Pavilion flag could be seen fluttering through the foliage of the trees. As they drew near, Earle saw that the Pavilion was composed of a various agglomeration of buildings. On the right, as they came through the big, open gates of the Park, were the official headquarters of the Director. This was a building of some height set on a high balconied platform, and reached by a flight of steps, supplemented by a kind of inclined gangplank for children and baby-carriages. Here, behind a wire grating, like a spider spinning his web, sat the Director in person, small, slight, dark and nervous. Here one purchased the season tickets, without which, as Nadiézhda explained to Earle, no one can stay in a Russian Kurort, which is managed by the municipality. At the other end of the long, high room was a gleaming altar, over which the priests officiated when the municipality celebrated the name-day of some saint or

patriarch of the Greco-Russian church. Following Nadiézhda's instructions, Earle purchased a season ticket and also bathing coupons for the large pool from a blond and rather coquettish girl, at whom he did not give a second glance, and they walked down the steps to the Pavilion, which stood at the foot of a high, sloping causeway.

Nadiézhda glanced at the sign standing at the foot of this descent. "Temperature, 20 degrees," she said. "The water is quite warm to-day." She led him to the platform of the Pavilion, over which was built a kind of roofed-in porch. To the right and left led long, narrow platforms along the water's edge, barred by doors labeled respectively "*Dlid Mushchin* (For men) and *Dlid Dam*" (For ladies).

"Here our ways diverge." Nadiézhda turned, and held out her hand.

"I have been awfully pleased to make your acquaintance," she added, with a flashing smile.

"So have I." He pressed her hand cordially. "Tell me something, before you go."

"With pleasure, if it isn't confidential," she rejoined saucily.

"Your sister said you were known in the musical circles of Petersburg, or words to that effect. Does that mean that you are a musician?"

"I am a professional concert performer on the violin."

"That's interesting," he commented, as he released her hand slowly. "Will you promise to play for me some day? . . . I am very fond of music . . . especially the violin."

"I certainly will."

"For me, alone?"

Nadiézhda flung back her head with the coquetry he had noticed in her before.

"What a monopolist!" she flung at him.

"But will you?"

"Yes, I will!" she promised. "As alone as we can be. I will tell you what. . . . I will get my violin some day and go with you to the steppe, and play for your sole pleasure. There. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied!" They laughed together as they turned away and separated.

After a bearded peasant had stamped his ticket, Earle pushed open the door to the left, walked down the full length of the

narrow, gently-rocking platform, and entered the swinging door of the large pool at the right.

. . . A wide, square body of sparkling water, fenced in with high palings painted white, beneath a warm and cloudless sky. Around the pool ran a species of loggia, into which a series of doorless compartments opened. Some of the men were undressing, others dressing; a few were leaning over the balustrade, talking together as they smoked their cigarettes, and watching the bathers. . . . On a raised platform overlooking the water a last group sat in the hot sun, which brought out upon their steaming bodies a rosy glow.

The American found an unoccupied compartment and quickly undressed, smiling rather disdainfully as he saw the floundering efforts of the men, almost all of whom clung to shallow water. From the bottom of his heart, with the healthy contempt of the Anglo-Saxon male for foreign weaklings, he despised the Russian men and boys who splashed about the surging waters of the pool, unable at best to swim more than a half dozen strokes, afraid to venture out into the open lake through the small square cut through the timbered barrier. He saw and recognized Gavrilko, the Khárkoff Prokurór, splashing and spluttering along by the cord—a conical bonnet of white canvas with ear flaps pulled down over his shaven head—progressing, with incredible exertions, at the rate of scarcely a foot a minute. He also recognized Vladímir Yermoláeff, his black-rimmed glasses bulging out his flabby nose, puffing and panting like a fat and overladen walrus, trying to learn how to swim in the roped-off division for beginners, and apparently learning nothing at all.

A dozen men shouted and nodded approvingly to one another with good-natured envy, as the American, tall and broad-shouldered, firmly muscled, his arms bulging at the biceps, his waist incurved with the line that all athletes are proud to show, walked out upon the projecting platform, and dived cleanly, with scarcely a splash, into the middle of the pool, whence he swam under water, with astounding swiftness, between cord and barricade, out into the sunlit, rippling Lake.

Out alone on the cool water's heaving level, fighting lustily with Nature, with a whole sea to conquer. Out alone, swimming far and free, till the green of the further shore grew dim, and even the music of the Park orchestra sank to a faint melodic throbbing. Then back again, and a brisk rubbing until his skin was all aglow. Dressing and return.

Refreshed and tingling all over, he reëntered the Park.

The wide Promenade leading from the Kursal to the Lake ended on the Lake side in a broad semicircle. Here a low wall, lined with the usual benches, overlooked a steep embankment which fell sheer to the water line. On one of these benches, occupied only by a single person, Earle seated himself. Half turned, one elbow resting on the parapet behind him, he gazed out over the glinting, diamond-bright facets of the dancing water, at "the thousand little laughters of the Russian Lake below," beholding with abstracted eyes the low, verdure-clad shore and the soldiers' barracks across the Lake, which swept out like an enormous silver plate, burnished and dazzling in the relentless noon-time glare . . . hearing, but scarcely heeding, the lively strains of the orchestra.

One of the swift reactions habitual with him and which usually followed violent physical exertion had come upon him. He did not even notice that the person who sat at the further end of the bench was Mária Aleksíevna, the strange-looking creature who, as Nadiézhda had told him, was a *Psychopátka* (psychopath).

3

He looked up suddenly. A girl, shy and shrinking, stood before him: two dark and glowing eyes, a resplendent wistfulness, were fixed timidly upon his face.

"Hello!" he exclaimed in universally comprehensible English, with a pleasant smile.

Anna Ezrin smiled back gratefully, with curling Oriental lips. She was apparently grateful that a Gentile did not treat her as one beyond the Pale.

"*Zd-rr-ístè!*" she replied in a gentle contralto voice. "You are Meester Earle, truth?"

"Stephen Earle, at your service. And you and I were introduced a little while ago at the music, but I, it seems, did not catch your name."

"Anna Isáevna Ezrin."

"So I may call you Anna Isáevna. Your father's name would then be Isai. A good old biblical name. Won't you be seated?"

Anna Ezrin cast at him a swift and deerlike glance.

"We are Jews, you know. . . ." she warned bravely. "Perhaps, when I tell you that, you will not want to talk to me?"

"Why not?"

"Almost everybody in Russia is Anti-Semitic, you know."

Humility was in her face, and resignation, and a certain apathetic mournfulness.

"I do not share this prejudice."

She cast up at him again that swift and deerlike glance of gratitude.

"Because you are noble, Meester Earle. But here in Russia they hate and despise us. Nothing is too bad for them to do. You do not know, Meester Earle, how we suffer. . . ."

"I thought it was only the *poor* Jews who suffer. Shall we walk a little? The orchestra has just begun another air. . . . I think I recognize that—it is an aria from William Tell."

The little Jewess was proud and immensely self-conscious as she walked with this handsome, "*simpatichni*"¹ foreigner down the Promenade under the batteries of hostile, unkind, critical and uncharitable eyes.

"*Góspodi!* To walk with a Jewess! He can't be much!"

"The Lord forbid! Couldn't he find a *Russian*?"

"There's that American promenading with that Jewish girl. A *Gruzínka*,² it appears."

"Easily pleased, from all appearances."

"She's as proud as a peacock. Some one ought to take away some of her nose!" (Ought to take her down a peg.)

"He does not know his *milieu*, that is clear."

The American, oblivious to the wake of cold and hostile criticism that ran behind their passage, walked to and fro, sincerely interested in the timid, proud, pathetic little Hebrew maiden who was already revealing to him her inmost soul.

"But why should you suffer so, Anna Isáevna? You are still young. Your father is rich. You have been admitted to the University——?"

"I do not know why I suffer so much. I think I must have suffered since my birth. Mamma, you know, was like me—she lost her mind when I was only six years old, and she has never been the same. It broke my heart when I was still a little girl. And at the *gimnázia* (High School) later on, I never seemed to make any friends; I was always isolated, and everything seemed to worry me; every cold or hostile glance, every scolding of my teachers, every *yedínitsia* (zero) marked against me. We Jewish children, you know, Meester Earle, have to make a higher percentage than the rest, twenty-five instead of seventeen, and it makes it hard."

¹ Likable.

² Used here for a resident from the Caucasus region.

"It is unjust!"

"And then that terrible hatred of all Russians to the Jews. How it used to weigh on me—like a nightmare! At first I couldn't understand it. I used to try to join in with the others; to approach as they talked, to take a little part. But they always seemed to draw away from me, hardly answering at all, and it hurt so that I soon learned to stay away."

"Poor child! So you grew up lonely."

"Yes. Even now—and at times I have such a panic!"

"A panic?"

"Yes. Some terrible blackness hanging over me like a cloud. It frightens me so."

"And what do you do when you feel like that?"

"When I feel like that I become like a wild thing, and go off by myself, and smoke and smoke."

"Do you smoke already?"

"Yes. I have smoked since I was sixteen. Doesn't nearly every one in Russia? Women, I mean?"

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-two."

"I could never have believed it. You look scarcely more than seventeen to me."

"Because of my braids, probably. I look hideous with my hair up."

At that moment a woman of about forty, with a dark, intelligent face, caught the young Jewish maiden's eye as she passed the semi-circular row of benches facing the orchestra like a horseshoe, and beckoned to her. Reluctantly Anna Ezrin obeyed the summons.

"Excuse me, Meester Earle. Some one is calling me. . . . My aunt. . . ."

"Your aunt?"

"Perhaps we could talk some time again," she added hurriedly.

"You are so kind . . . I . . . I love to talk with you."

In a flash she was gone, with one last swift gaze.

"Poor creature!" thought Earle as he made his way back again to the bench where he had been when Anna Ezrin came. "Poor little creature! So humble. Why should she not have the right to converse as much as others? In what way was she inferior to those who hated and despised her race?"

Earle dropped again on the bench and lighted another cigarette. . . .

He had now become aware of the presence of the Psychopátka.

She was looking straight before her, with a fixed and lusterless gaze, which, with her deadly paleness, impressed him as uncanny. He had just begun to study the rings—a scintillating brightness of costly gems—with which her fingers were covered, when a clear voice struck upon his ear.

"Zdrástě, Monsieur l'Américain!"

He looked up quickly. Before him, all fresh and glowing from her bath, eyes a gray gleam in a rosy face, stood Eléna Malinóffsky. Her lips curved in a frank smile, she offered him her hand as he rose. Receiving a sudden impression of honesty, good-comradeship and straightforwardness, qualities which he most prized in women, he pressed her hand in a strong, warm pressure, and the answering pressure was equally as strong and cordial, like a Masonic grip, cementing friendship between them.

"Won't you sit down?" Earle motioned toward the bench where Mária Aleksiéevna, her feet drawn up beneath her, her white skirts gathered all about her, sat like a small, mysterious Chinese idol, gazing up at them with pale, impassive countenance as they stood before her talking.

"I think I'd rather walk, wouldn't you?" Her invitation was so clear that Earle at once assented.

"Won't you come too, Mária Aleksiéevna?" asked Eléna.

"No, thank you," she replied, remaining coldly impassive; "I prefer to sit."

4

So Eléna and the American walked off together; he tall, broad-shouldered, walking with firm, elastic step; she lithe, with all her opulence, and graceful, her gray eyes deep and shining beneath the cloud of dark hair, which fell low upon her brow. Only Eléna saw the faces that approached, the covering hands, the half-averted, compassionate or ruthless eyes; but she held her head high and gave no heed.

Up and down, back and forth, between walls of sun-glinted, rustling green, past the proscenium, pouring out its flood of harmony, to the white and yellow Kursal, whose triple stairs were crowded with laughing girls and shaven-headed, skylarking boys; then back again, glimpsing the silvery vistas of the Lake, half hidden, half revealed, in fronded settings.

They talked quietly and conventionally at first; about the weather, about the bathing, about Mária Aleksiéevna.

"What a number of rings she wears," remarked Earle.

"Yes. And did you notice how she sits with her feet all doubled beneath her, and her skirts carefully tucked up?"

"She is a very strange character. The Daniloffs spoke of her when I was at their villa. I should like to write a story about her, if I only had something to base it upon. She is so mysterious."

"No one knows any more than what the Daniloffs probably told you. No, I am wrong. My father knows something; but he won't tell, and there are many rumors. They say there is something wrong between her and her husband. No, I don't mean transferred affections; that is a matter of course in Russia (Eléna laughed, somewhat hardly); something dark and terrible. Nobody knows what. She makes no secret of the fact that he is never admitted to her rooms. Even after an absence of months, he must wait until she comes down. And she has a servant, a deaf-mute whom she took from the orphan asylum, a mere wild savage, whom she brought up and trained. She is like a dog, sleeping across the threshold at night, on the bare floor, with a rolled-up coat beneath her head. And Mária Aleksiévna keeps a loaded revolver day and night in a lacquer box standing near her bed."

"How extraordinary! Evidently the victim of an *idée fixe*. She is probably no more crazy in principle, however, than the rest of us."

"Do you think we're all crazy?" asked Eléna with a little laugh.

"Yes!"

"Most of us are, in some direction. I know *I* am crazy. Aren't you?"

"Absolutely!" returned Earle laughing. "But I hope that the rest of the world doesn't see it."

"The world?" commented Eléna with contempt. "Does the world ever see anything of what really goes on in the human soul?"

"It sees what it can understand—no more."

"People are so blind, and stupid, and malicious!" declared Eléna, in a sudden little outburst. "They make up their own picture, from outward impressions, from other people's judgments, and accept it as a life portrait. . . . Especially women. . . ."

"Have you found women worse offenders in that regard than men?"

"Yes, I have!" said Eléna flatly.

"And yet women are supposed to be led by instinct, which is said to be infallible!"

"It is far from infallible."

"You are the very first woman I have ever met," said Earle joyously, "who has admitted that."

"I ought to admit it," she replied, "I have suffered from it."

"Tell me about it."

"I may—some day."

"Why not now?"

"Oh, it's too long a story," she evaded.

"Has the world hurt you very badly?" he asked gently. "I don't ask from idle curiosity. Don't answer if you don't care to."

"Life has hurt me, yes," she admitted. "Since my girlhood."

"How?"

"I was never a happy child," she began, and then broke off.

"Why not?"

"Oh, poor Mama was very strict. She had her own ideas of how a young girl should be brought up. When I was quite young, in the first years of my *gimndzia* I used to suffer because Mama insisted on dressing me in my school uniform of plain gray cloth, with my hair parted in the middle and brushed down flat all around. How I used to envy my girl friends, and how I suffered when I went to their houses, to some evening party, and saw all the girls of my age dressed in white dresses, all lace and embroidery, with silk stockings, and shiny slippers, and pink ribbons in their hair! You know those people who think children can't suffer are wrong; they suffer terribly! Poor Mama—I think I have never quite forgiven her!"

"But when you were no longer small, she relaxed, I presume?"

"On the contrary. She was very strict. I was always accompanied everywhere, and whenever I spoke with a boy, Mama was always present. In consequence, I never could become very intimate with any one; and while other girls got married to men they knew and liked, I remained *vieille fille*, not even engaged till I was nearly nineteen."

"All the better, according to my theory. How old are you now, if I may ask?"

"Twenty. I can't agree. How many balls I went to with Mama, and saw there men whom I could have adored, and Mama never let me dance with them."

"For instance?"

"Well, for instance—— Oh! how odd!"

"What?"

"Listen. The orchestra is playing the very waltz to which I used to dance so often. How it all comes back to me!"

Her head thrown back, her shining gray eyes gazing down at him from under half-closed lids, her sensitive lips parted in a pleased smile, Eléna listened to the sprightly strains, which Earle recognized at once as the selection which Makedónsky had had played in the Park. Suddenly, as the orchestra repeated the first notes, Eléna began to sing, beneath her breath:

Potselúi menyái
Dái mnié sólntsè dniái
Vzgládom níézhnym,
Bezmetézhnym,
Potselúi menyái ¹

"That waltz brings back to me interesting memories."

"Tell them to me!" urged Earle, very much interested. Now he knew that he would hear about her relations with the stately officer.

"I was just seventeen and my hair was still down my back. It was my first *big* ball. All the *chic* officers of the town were coming. And Mama, for a wonder, had a coming-out dress made for me; it was red, and reached to my ankles. And I had red ribbons in my hair, and just a bit of *décolleté*, as much as Mama would allow. And a bunch of roses my brother bought for me. Everybody said I was very pretty, and Avdótia, my old nurse, sat in the kitchen and cried because I had grown up. And at the ball I had great success—several University students invited me. I never cared for *gimnaststi*,² you know, even when I was sixteen; I just despised them—all I cared for was the students and *chic* officers. But after every dance my partners had to bring me back to Mama. And that spoiled all my evening. All the other girls sat out in the conservatory and in the corners talking: only *I* had to be brought back. And I was feeling unhappy over this; so the next time I was invited I refused.

"And as I sat there all disconsolate, in my new red dress and ribbons, a group of officers came in, clinking their swords and

¹ A rather banal waltz-melody which may be rendered thus:

Kiss me, love, to-night!
Fill my soul with light!
With glance wile-weaving,
Not deceiving,
Kiss me love, to-night!

² School boys.

spurs. And at their head was an officer everybody was talking about for his brave and reckless deeds in the Japanese war—his picture was in all the papers. ("Makedónsky!" thought Earle.) He had on his braided coat with epaulettes; and he wore white, tight-fitting Hussar's breeches, and shining Hussar boots with tassels reaching half way to his knee. And he stood with such an ease, looking, to my young and adoring eyes, like a King, an apparition from another sphere, and gazed around the room. I could see the cold and masterful glint of his gray eyes, and his blond mustache, turned up at the corners, and a deep cleft in his chin.

"And then his eyes came to me and stopped, and I nearly died of fright. And then I saw him turn and speak to one of the officers with him, his eyes on my face. And my heart nearly stopped beating when he and the other officer came on, and he was introduced to me and bowed and said,

"May I ask you for the honor of this waltz, Mademoiselle?"

"And they played that waltz?"

"That very waltz, and I shall never forget how he unbuckled his sword and threw it with a clatter on the bench, with such an ease and mastery—I can't describe it!"

"And then he came to me and put his arm around my waist—one, two, three! and we were off, and Mama not looking very pleased: she was most afraid of officers, you know. And I was in a dream—and he bending over and plunging his cold gray eyes into mine, as he talked, and all the time that '*Potselúí menyád! potselúí menyád!*' I could see his mouth beneath his blond mustache—such a strong and beautiful and cruel mouth—*akh!*"

Eléna gazed at Earle with flushed cheeks, with an expression so eager and intense, so filled with the memory of her girlish infatuation, that Earle almost smiled. And yet he understood.

"That officer was evidently your ideal."

"No—he wasn't my ideal. But he had some magnetic force. It's because I know that such men exist that I understand what love is, and why it—. Such a man—*akh!*"

"I fear Mama was wise to insist on accompanying you to your balls," he commented slyly.

Eléna laughed.

"Perhaps she was. But what did she accomplish? At the age of nineteen I went to Petersburg and got engaged to a man who—well, perhaps I'd better be discreet."

"Perhaps you'll meet the officer again."

Eléna flushed and was discreetly silent, while Earle smiled into his mustache.

"Enough of me, please!" exclaimed Eléna suddenly. "You have not told me yet *your* ideal."

"My ideal?" replied the American, slowly, with a queer smile. "Frankly, I don't know. I fear I have none, if it means blonde, or brunette, fair or dark or auburn. . . ."

"*Est-elle blonde, brune ou rousse, je l'ignore,*" he quoted.

"But you must have *some* ideal!" rejoined Eléna, unbelievably.

"I have. A pagan goddess."

Eléna smiled, then grew serious.

"Promise me at least one thing."

"What?"

"That even if you meet this—this pagan goddess, you will continue to be my friend."

"Always. There's my hand to bind the bargain."

"The band has stopped—it is time to go."

Eléna gave him her hand. "You mustn't!" she warned laughingly, as he instinctively raised it. "Don't you know that in Russia you may kiss the hand only of a married woman, never of an unmarried girl? Oh, I am angry!" she cried with vexation, as he swiftly and audaciously pressed it to his lips. . . . "Farewell!"

She left him with great dignity, but turned after a moment and smiled forgivingly. Earle went back alone. . . . After a few moments he digressed into one of the triangular side-paths that cut the square obliquely, seated himself on a bench and meditatively lighted a cigarette.

Wrapped in his thoughts he paid no heed to the occasional passers-by. He was thinking of all that Eléna Malinóffsky had told him, and of all that they had discussed.

"What a pity. . . ." he thought.

A deep voice behind him, which had a note of imperiousness and anger, broke in upon his meditations.

"I told you not to speak to me when we met. . . . Do you think——"

He turned around, and on the parallel path running parallel with that where he sat, he distinguished a tall officer, walking with a young woman in a red dress. . . . A moment after he turned they passed behind a clump of high trees. . . . Further beyond, where the road opened again, he saw the officer walking alone; the woman in the red dress had turned off into a transversal

path. . . . In the officer Earle recognized the stately figure, and the masterful stride; he had already recognized the voice. . . . That, surely, was Makedónsky. Who his companion had been, he had no way of knowing. After a moment, he rose, and took his way leisurely to the Sanatorium, for the needles of his watch marked nearly one o'clock.

5

The high white doors of the Sanatorium stood widely open; the single door leading to the dining-room was also open. Over the spacious terrace, on which the high windows looked, over the snow-white wall and Doric columns, shone a bright and golden radiance, penetrating through the foliage of the sighing poplars, dancing on wall and casement, flickering over balcony, even stealing through the wide-open central doors, and projecting sudden javelins of light across the cool and shaded hall.

So it flickered in through the open door and windows of the *stolóvaya*,¹ a wide, long room, across which, lengthwise, ran two parallel tables. At the end of the room stood the china-closet; at the right stood a table with a samovár, spirit-lamps and other domestic apparatus.

At the end of the table nearest the door presided Dr. Malinóffsky, bent and white-bearded, morose and silent. Also Ekaterína herself, the little, squirrel-like old lady, and her sister Sónia Ivánovna, a grim, taciturn woman of about Ekaterína's own age. Eléna sat with her sister, Liubóff, the Moscow Professor—a stout, somber-looking woman of thirty, with flat-combed hair. At the right, on the other side of the table, sat the Prokurór, his wife, and his mother-in-law, a talkative, lively, black-eyed old woman with a mole on her upper lip; all three making noise enough for a dozen. Opposite the Prokurór's mother-in-law, Mária Aleksiéevna.

Earle had been introduced to so many new people that he was quite bewildered.

This high-busted, black-haired, sallow, middle-aged lady, so well bred as almost to seem artificial, was Madame Caclamános, a Franco-Greco-Russian lady, who sat with her daughter Marússia, a young female cub of about fifteen. Opposite them sat another Greek family, the Negropóntes, from Odessa.

This thin, Spanish-looking *hidalgo*, with the pepper-and-salt mustache, so dark as to look almost like a blackamoor, was Yosíf Naúmevich Rabinóvich, a Jew; by profession a civil-engineer,

¹ Dining room.

unashamed of his race—as irrepressible as the Prokurór. By his side sat Anna Isaévna, the pretty, sad, little Jewess from the Caucasus, with her aunt, Sófia Sergiévna by name, thin, dark, intelligent, no longer young.

A pale, thin, meditative-looking man of about fifty, with sandy hair and beard streaked with gray, with thoughtful, near-sighted blue eyes behind rimmed eyeglasses, and a gentle way, proved to be Alekséi Andréich, the School Inspector. His wife, Tatiána Lvóvna, was a quiet, modest little woman, with neatly arranged brown hair, and high cheekbones.

Earle was also introduced to Klara Petróvna, small, plump, middle-aged, with a face like a stolid, good-natured dog; she, too, looked intelligent, with keen, dark gaze, as though she had some inner life. The woman beside her was Mária Grigórevna, the young wife of an old "Pope." A blondish woman, rather low-browed, with small gray eyes; a short, somewhat heavy nose, turned up slightly at the end; a wide, frank mouth and a slow and pleasant smile—a typical Russian face.

A tall, white-bearded, reticent man with a pendulous lower lip, who looked fifty but who, it appeared, was seventy years of age, was introduced as Yeroním Philíppich, a factory owner from Khárkoff.

Lastly, the *Kozáchka*, or "Cossackess," as they had christened her in the Sanatorium; a Colonel's wife, a woman no longer young, with a broad, and rather common face, of a mottled, brick-red complexion, with shrewd brown eyes and a wide, thin-lipped mouth, and who wore earrings of red coral in her ears. With her sat a fair, slender, very refined looking lady of about thirty, of the courtly circles of St. Petersburg. Crutches beside her chair told why she, too, had come to try the mineral waters of Slaviánsk.

Evgénia Yermoláevna was sweeping in and out majestically with her train dragging behind her, thundering forth orders and reprimands to the *Ekonomka*,¹ and other servants, like a female Jove.

"Nobody should have children!" the irrepressible Prokurór was howling across the table at Ekaterína Ivánovna, with a strong lisp. "They are a bother and a trial from childhood to the grave, and we don't need them! When I went to the Univerthity, I learned the Malthuthian law. No human rathe ever produthed conthtantly. War and pethilenthe had to thweep uth off. Look at Natália Mikháilovna and mythelf! A year

¹ Housekeeper.

ago we were happy—in our own thothiety. Now we have a child—a thickly child too, which thtandth conthtantly between uth. A year ago, in Khárkoff, I would thay to my wife, ‘Natalia, I’m thick of all thith Prokuróorth grind—let’t take a run down to Yalta and get a retht.’ And off we’d go by the evening train. Now we have to drag the child, or it ith thick, and we can’t go. And why, for *heaven’t*h thake, did we have it? Why did we have it, I athk! do we know ourthelveth?”

“Every woman has a right to be a mother,” spoke up Ekaterína Ivánovna, with the feminine indignation which all women feel at such aspersions on their main and special function.

“Yeth! thatth it! *Exthactly! Prethithly!*” screamed the Prokurór, his lisp more pronounced than ever. “The *women* want it! It’t the *women* that have the inthtinkt to overpopulat! They are the deadly enemieth of the human rathe! At leatht let the overproduction be confined to people who are unmarried; then marriageth will be happier. Why did I ever need a child? I have dothenth of children whom I never thaw, all over Ruthia.” He roared with glee as he saw the pale quiver on his wife’s thin face and the disapproving expressions, tempered with amusement, cast at him by all who heard.

“You shouldn’t talk that way, Volódia,” said his wife gently, though her thin lips trembled.

“*Why* shouldn’t I talk ath I *want* to talk?” screamed the Prokurór. “One of my principleth ith to thay *what* I think, *when* I think, *how* I think. The trouble with our prethent thivilithation ith that ith path hath wandered too far from Nature. Return to Nature ith my thlogan. Hundredth are howling for thuch a return all over Ruthia, claiming that all our troubleth come from our over-artifithial, unnatural habit of life. Very good! thay I, and let’t begin to return by looking at all thingth naturally. Let’t talk ath the animalth would talk if they could thpeak—take off the thwaddling-clotheth from our mindth, harden our emotionth, look at thingth ath they really are. That’t what I thaid the other day—do you remember, Natalia?—when we were at dinner at the Baron Krauffth. We were talking of thummer amuthementth—and thwimming came up. ‘Bathing in Ruthia,’ I cried out with full conviction, ‘who wantth to bathe all cooped up with other men? Give me the beacheth abroad, where every one ith together. For inthtanth, a big wave baleth a pretty girl drethed practically in a thtate of nature off her feet; you ruth, plunge and thwim like a hero to her rethcue, grab her and give her a good squeethe. Ha! ha! ha! and get

a nithe thmile from her, too, in the bargain—ho! ho! ha! ha! and the baron'th wife looked daggerth—German woman, you know!—of courth her young daughter Lottchen wath at the table. *Backfische*; and half-baked ath their name implieth. Yeth—thay I—I believe in thpeaking of thingth that ekthitht *ath* they ekthitht. Thicknetheth for inthtanth: nothing you could thay could upthet me; at thith very moment ath I eat my cheethe and thauthage, and drink my coffee, you could thpeak to me about——”

“Volódia!” exclaimed his wife, putting her hand on his arm imploringly.

“Ha! ha!” screamed the Prokurór with a high-pitched, diabolical laugh, pointing with his finger at her discomfited face. “Ha! ha! ho! ho!”

“Thpeaking of medithine,” he suddenly burst forth again, addressing old Dr. Malinóffsky, who was gazing at him silently, studying him as Lombroso would study a criminal, “do you know what the betht cure for inthomnia ith?”

“There is no cure in all proper sense of the word for in-somnia,” replied Dr. Malinóffsky, laconically, continuing to sip his tea.

“Ah, ha! *There* ith where you're mithaken!” howled the Prokurór, with expansive triumph. “I have dithcovered the great-eht panathea for inthomnia thince the world began. A remedy which overcometh every thound and dithturbanth—a regiment of tholdierth could fire a volley beneath my windowth and I would thleep ath peathefully ath a child. *Antiphoneth!*”

“I didn't catch the name of the remedy,” said the American, who had been sitting all this time across the table, gazing in silence at the Prokurór's closely shaven head, dark, yellow-skinned face, black, sparkling eyes, wiry black mustache, and small pointed chin-beard with cold disgust.

“Antiphoneth! Antiphoneth! Antiphoneth!” howled the Prokurór triumphantly, putting a long brown finger to his ear. “You buy them anywhere. Five rubleth and you are in peathe. When I came here I nearly went crathy. Thothe accurthed dogth, they thtart in at eleven o'clock at night, and bark like mad, chathing every thtray dog that trieth to poke it'th hungry muthe underneath the gate. People talking till one o'clock in the morning, thinging, playing harmoniumth; roothterth crowing in the middle of the night, thomebody'th brat howling——”

“Absolutely right! Absolutely right!” suddenly screamed Mária Aleksiévna across the table. “I was telling your mother-

in-law how I am disturbed every night; it is simply outrageous. That child is the worst—its screams are something horrible.”

“Whose child is it?” asked Klara Petróvna from the other end of the table.

“It’s the brat of that family of Jews!” screamed back Mária Aleksiéevna, quite oblivious to the presence of the howling blackamoor and the silent girl from the Caucasus, who flushed and kept her head down, gazing at her coffee. “The fat woman, pitted with smallpox, that Doctor girl with her, her niece, I believe, and their yellow-eyed brat. They live just like animals in their rooms, eating, drinking and sleeping; and when they come out they glare at you as though you were wild beasts! Last night I thought I would go crazy! And when I asked Aniúta this morning if she knew why the child cried so, she told me that the little darling wanted a *pencil*, and there was none in the room, so the little precious howled, till his *mamásha* rang for Aniúta, who had to come up from the hall where she was sleeping, find a pencil and bring it to him!”

Several people laughed ironically as Mária Aleksiéevna poured forth her tale. They had little sympathy for her, her moods alternating between wild, if infrequent torrents of blame and vituperation, and a strange and quite unnatural silence.

“Speaking of sleeping,” howled from the other side of the table the blackamoor Jew, “did you ever hear the story of the Armenian who had to entertain a young lady at a ball?”

Whereupon, with many gestures, his white eyeballs rolling in his black face, his pepper-and-salt imperial quivering, he told with the greatest gusto the following anecdote:

“An Armenian at a ball, asked to *zanimát* (entertain) a young girl from the Caucasus who had just come to town, sits with her in absolute silence. At last he asks her,

“‘Effer pin to Crimea?’

“‘Never’—says she with animation. ‘Is it pretty there?’

“‘Ko dere yourself unt you’ll fint out,’ answered the Armenian —(“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” howled Rabinóvich, as a titter ran down the table. “That isn’t all—there’s more coming!”) So the girl flashed at him an indignant glance, for she thought he was a *nakhál* (an insolent fellow) only he didn’t mean it (you know what fools those Armenians are!), and grew silent. And again for five minutes, silence. Then says the Armenian (ha! ha!) ‘To you snore ven you sleep?’ and when the girl laughed, in spite of herself, and said she probably did,

and what of it? 'So to I,' says the Armenian. *Odín Simpdti!*"¹

"It's queer Armenians speak such bad Russian," said the Cossackess, after the laughter had subsided. "They all go to Russian schools, but they never seem to learn."

"Becaethe they are foolth," averred the Prokurór superbly. "I could learn any foreign language in a week, mythelf!"

"To what extent?" asked the American contemptuously, "and by what method?"

"By my own method," retorted the Prokurór belligerently. "Enough to ekthpreth all my ideath. Do you dithpute it?"

Earle suddenly laughed.

"No, I won't dispute that last statement!" he replied, pushing back his chair.

The Prokurór glared with fury as the whole company about the table burst into a laugh at his expense.

¹ Bad grammar; equivalent to "one common ground of sympathy."

CHAPTER IV

I

AFTER lunch, as Earle discovered, the guests of the Sanatorium usually sat out on the terrace for about an hour, chatting and smoking; then they went to their rooms for a siesta and remained there most of the afternoon. There were two good-sized tables on the terrace, one on each side the central doors; here those who liked to read their newspaper brought by the late morning train, were wont to congregate; others, whom Dr. Malinóffsky had laconically named the *splétniki* (gossips) preferred to sit apart on the terrace or out on the wide and spacious steps, and gossip with religious fervor about the Kurort life, the Kurort people and more particularly, the percentage of Kurort people who lived in the Sanatorium. To the first group, reinforced by the American, belonged Dr. Malinóffsky, Yeroním Philippich, Anatól Borísovich, Rabinóvich; in other words, the men; to the second group belonged all the women.

On this particular afternoon in question, a group had formed (all women) on the steps of the Sanatorium. Earle, who sat near, could not help overhearing their conversation, which seemed to deal mostly with the flirtations of the Prokurór, and with his wife's reactions.

"It was Marússia Caclamános," Klara Petrónva was saying, lowering her voice and casting a glance at the Franco-Greek lady, who sat on the terrace. "I'm surprised that Mária Aleksiéevna didn't speak of it. Marússia went to a dance, you know, and didn't come back until two o'clock in the morning. She rapped—the electric button must have been out of order. There was a whole crowd with her, the Basilídes and the Daníloffs; I heard them talking and laughing as they came up the path from the gate."

"It's strange that Mme. Caclamános lets Marússia stay out so late at night—she seems to be so correct herself," remarked the aunt of Anna Isáevna, lighting another cigarette.

"Did you ever notice," asked the Kozáchka, "that all Greeks are correct? Look, for instance, at the Basilídes. Every one of them is rigid in the matter of etiquette."

"Yes, and what is the consequence?" asked Sófía Ivánovna, combatively. "One dies of *skúka* (ennui) at their home. Between Greeks and Russians, or anybody and Russians, give me Russians every time. They may be rough, and far from rigid in matters of etiquette or anything else, but at least they have good hearts, and they're honest and they're sincere, which is more than I can say of Greeks."

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*——" quoted old Dr. Malinófsky ironically from the balcony above, to the enlightenment of no one; so the citation passed unperceived.

"As to correctness," said Klara Petróvna, lowering her voice, while the other women drew closer, "I don't consider the attitude of Olga Nikoláevna (the Franco-Greek lady) to the Prokurór at all correct, if you want *my* opinion. She certainly flirts. And she goes around telling everybody that his wife is jealous."

"That isn't as bad as *his* telling it," observed Mária Grigórevna. "He actually had the impudence to come up to me the other day and begin a conversation about the weather, or I don't know what; and after a couple of minutes he lowers his voice and says: 'You know—I have no right to talk to you; my wife is frightfully jealous.' 'And very kind and honorable of you to tell it,' I answered; but, *Bózhè mói!*¹ such remarks as those are simply on the wind; he is so wrapped up in himself that nothing can touch him."

"Whom are you talking about?" asked Mme. Caclamános, coming down with the lame girl from the terrace.

"About the Gospodín Prokurór," responded Sófía Sergiévna.

Mme. Caclamános began to laugh, a well-bred, artificial little laugh, showing her white teeth; the two front ones overlapped slightly, giving to her smile a charm and piquancy of which she was very well aware.

"That awful man!" she exclaimed. "He is the *enfant terrible* of the whole Sanatorium. Do you ever talk about any one else? How his ears must burn!"

"Don't *you* talk about him?" asked Sófía Sergiévna ironically, taking another cigarette.

"Yes, I do!" admitted Mme. Caclamános flatly, suddenly on the defensive. "We all do. And why shouldn't we? He is the gayest, most intelligent, most interesting man in the Sanatorium. It's a pity his wife is so jealous. Only the other day he came up to me in the Park, and we had *such* an interesting chat! about souls; and about the way his first wife treated him; and how

¹ My Lord!

he almost lost his reason when she threw him over. (He took all the legal blame upon himself, you know.) And how he hates to have his child by the first marriage brought up in the house of the man who took his wife from him, and how unhappy he is now.

"'You know, Olga Nikoláevna,' he said, and the tears stood in his eyes, 'I have no right to talk to you. My wife is frightfully jealous.'"

At which Mária Grigórevna put out her tongue most drolly, and all the gossips laughed maliciously, bringing a slight flush to the Greek lady's smooth and sallow cheeks, though she did not understand the cause of the general amusement.

"He tells that to everybody," explained Klara Petrónva, with some malice. "Don't think *you* are his only confidante and soul-consoler, Olga Nikoláevna. Did you hear what happened last Monday? No! Well, I'll tell you; all the rest know it. You know that fat, sly-looking girl, Nina Sergiévna, the Khárkoff Conservatory pupil, who eats in her room? Well, every time she has met the Prokurór, she has tried to have an *aparté* with him, and he, you may be sure, was no less eager. But his wife, as you remarked, is jealous, and she has good cause to be, as every one of us here knows, and as both he and she admit.

"*Nu*, he goes away every Monday to Khárkoff to attend to his business, and comes back Tuesday. Last Monday he had a moment with Nina alone at the music, and deliberately makes an appointment to meet her at the Station. Right after dinner, when he knows his wife has her siesta, he meets Nina and a friend of hers (Ludmila Anatólevna—you've seen her in the Park, a tall, dark girl with a scandalously low *décolleté*), takes them riding in an *izvóshchik*,¹ gives them ice-cream and candy, and flirts like a madman with both of them; and all the time his poor wife thinks he's on his way to Khárkoff.

"Then he takes a late train for Khárkoff, and when he says good-by he actually has the impudence to ask them not to betray him. 'Don't let my wife know about this, girls; you know how jealous she is. Why should she suffer?' They thought it was a fine joke.

"Of course Nina Sergiévna told us all about it. 'But why do you encourage his unfaithfulness?' I asked her, seriously; and I meant it too, for between ourselves I'm sorry for his wife; she may be hysterical, and sharp, and disagreeable, or anything you

¹ A Russian open carriage.

like, but she loves her husband, why, I can't understand; she even neglects her child for his sake; and she took him when he was a nervous wreck, and brought him back to a state where he can live and do his work, and it's a pretty bitter thing for her to have a husband who cares only for other women, and openly proclaiming it. And what do you think she answered? 'I encourage him because his wife is an *uródet*s (scarecrow) and holds the poor man on an iron chain; he actually suffers. We have to *educate* her!'

"And everybody hearing of his escapade except his wife, poor creature! bowing and greeting the Nina girl every morning, and she with a catty gleam in her yellow eyes every time she meets her. And yesterday the *Prokurórsha*¹ heard of it, as was, of course, inevitable, in a place like this; and she sat down before the gate all alone, and cried, and said to me, when I went to her, and tried to console her—so bitterly:

"Yes, they're all trying to "educate" me, and I have no husband—none, none!"

"Then why don't you leave him?" I asked, logically enough.

"And she turned to me, her eyes all swimming in tears—clever eyes they are, you'll admit, with understanding and sense, and she answered simply:

"Listen, Klara Petróvna, I took the Prokurór when he was a nervous wreck, as you know, raging, and then crying and sobbing every moment, like a little child; so bad his people even thought of sending him to the Insane Asylum; and for three years I've labored with him, three of the best years of my life, and now I'm a wreck myself, but I've brought him back somewhere near to what he was before. And I'm proud of it, Klara Petróvna,' says she, her eyes shining through her tears, 'and what he is to-day he owes to me. And now I deserve my reward,' she says, with her face all white and quivering. 'I had my child only to bring us closer together, not for my own sake, as *he* thinks; and Klara Petróvna,' she says, in a voice that somehow made me tremble, 'God pardon me for what I'm going to say, but perhaps he'll understand it: if some woman takes my husband away from me, after all my labors and sufferings, and sleepless nights, then I'll have nothing in the world to live for—*nothing!*' And then she began to cry so hard I just had to take her in my arms, and hush and console her.

"And that's why I'm sorry for her, and why I think that every woman who encourages or solicits her husband's attentions,

¹Wife of the Prokurór.

and stirs him and other people up against her is *low*, and let the cap be put on the head of any one whom it will fit," she ended, glancing around the circle.

Madame Caclamános, Mária Grigórevna and the Kozáchka did their best to show that the cap did not fit *them* at all events; but the keen-blunt canine gaze of Klara Petróna bored through their pretense; and they knew it, and she knew it, and they knew that she knew it.

"They're very rich, aren't they?" asked the lame girl, in her soft, refined voice, to ease the tension.

"A million rubles. They're building a villa now away off on the steppe, which will cost them one hundred thousand."

"I pity any one who builds a house for *him*!" remarked Sófia Sergiévna.

"Why?"

"Because he's such a fusser. They say he counts every bit of laundry himself. And stingy—no name for it! He fights over every kopek. Some people went away last week, and happened to let fall the remark that they had several bottles of *kifir*¹ left over on their hands. At which the Prokurór pricked up his ears. 'How many bottles have you?' he asked, his black eyes gleaming. 'Five. Absolutely intact. Do you want to buy them from us? We paid fifteen kopeks a bottle.' 'Yes,' says the Prokurór, as solemn as a judge, 'I'll take them all. But as you're going away, and nobody else wants them, and they would be a dead loss anyway, I can offer you only half—eight kopeks a bottle,' he says. A man with a million rubles!"

"About his fussiness," added the Kozáchka, who was still struggling heroically to show the cap did not fit her, "he was boasting the other day about his neatness. 'I have everything in my room arranged,' says he, 'in thuch a way that I can get up in the middle of the night, and find anything from a pothtage thtamp to my wife'th inexprthiblt; and if I find anything hath been taken from itht plathe, it maketh me furiouth—I boil like a thamovár!'"

The people on the terrace gradually scattered. Some of the men remained on the balcony playing cards. Earle smoked innumerable cigarettes, making no attempt to talk to any one; he felt both physically and mentally fatigued. Finally he rose, and like most of the others, withdrew for an after-dinner siesta.

On his bed by the open window, through which a warm breeze

¹ A fermented drink.

was wafted in, he lay, stretched out full-length, his arms clasped behind his head, and meditated.

Strange people. . . . It was all like a moving picture, with new actors constantly passing on and off the screen. . . . Yet it was Life, throbbing and pulsing all around him. . . . Faces stood out in his memory: the Malinóffskys, Evgénia, the Daníloffs . . . the Prokurór . . . Eléna . . . Nadiézhda. . . . Yes, and the blond Princess. . . .

2

When he awoke, it was half-past four. He stretched himself lazily, yawned, and closed his eyes again for a minute which turned out to be a good half hour. . . . Finally he got up resolutely, went to the Russian washstand, and let the curved-up faucet spout cold water refreshingly into his flushed face. Vigorous ablutions followed, after which he dressed and sallied forth again. He wandered down the grassy street, walked for awhile on the steppe, and returning, gravitated to the Park. He found it quite deserted. The long paths, the Kursal steps, the very Promenade were void of human presence. It was like a deserted city. He seated himself on a bench not far from the Kursal, and smoked, and speculated whether or not he would go for a second swim. . . .

Time passed. . . He was just preparing to depart when a group of people, three men, turned in from the broad central avenue, and, coming toward him, interrupted his indolent and vagrant thoughts. As they drew near he recognized M. de Marly, Makedónsky, the majestic officer, and Prince Tatárinoff. M. de Marly, on seeing Earle, bowed courteously, and when he reached the bench, swerved and approached him, followed by his two companions.

"*Zdrástè*, Stepán Geórgevich!" he greeted with a smile. "I see that you are already becoming one of the devotees of our Slaviánsk Park."

"It is a beautiful Park," conceded Earle heartily. "I am certainly going to become one of its devotees."

M. de Marly smiled subtly.

"And also of our Slaviánsk beauties, I assume. Monsieur Earle, will you allow me to make you acquainted with my friends, Prince Tatárinoff and Colonel Makedónsky." The Prince and the handsome officer bowed politely. "Colonel Makedónsky," he added to Earle, "is one of our national prides. The echo of his gallant deeds in the Japanese War has resounded all over Russia. . . . I suggest, *gospodá*, that we all sit down for a few mo-

ments for a little chat. Monsieur Earle, as I told you, is an American by birth, a traveler and writer by profession, and speaks Russian like a Muscovite."

"The compliment is appreciated, but undeserved," protested Earle, as they all seated themselves.

Earle and Makedónsky looked at one another with a certain curiosity. Earle noted again the strong yet sensuous features, the beetling brows and steely color of the eyes, the quixotic eagle-sweep of nose, the iron mouth beneath the flowing blond mustache, the granite chin.

The face had something in it both powerful and evil, like a fallen angel, whose life and thoughts are not the life and thoughts of a traveler in the realm of good. This was the countenance of one to whom Self was the only God; who lived only for enjoyment of the moment; for pride and haughtiness and overweening self-conceit—*hubris*, the Greeks called it in a single word.

"I am living in Russia for an indefinite period," he found himself saying; "as long as I find it interesting."

"You are a writer, I think Prince Tatárinoff said?" Makedónsky's voice was strong and vibrant, the voice of a man of action, of a man who is perfectly sure of himself on all occasions.

"A writer. Yes."

"Of what kind, may I ask?"

"Oh, the word psychological would probably cover my field."

"Ah, you are interested in psychology? In Russia you will find more than you need of that."

"So I perceive daily."

"You should study the psychology of our army. You would find a rich field there."

"I realize that. I met some officers in Petersburg, but I did not know them well enough to learn much of life in army circles."

"You must come and have a talk with me. I shall be happy to be of service to you."

The charm of Makedónsky's smile, as he offered to be of service, struck again the American's attention. Now he understood the gossip he had overheard of the officer's phenomenal success with women.

"I thank you," he replied sincerely. "I shall be very glad to have a talk with you some day."

The masterful officer smiled again, but absently, as if only from courtesy, gazing past his interlocutor.

Seeing that Makedónsky's attention was wavering, and per-

ceiving his fixed glance, which looked beyond him, the American turned his head.

A young and very blond woman, beautifully gowned in vaporous white, with a long blue Chinese veil floating about her arms and shoulders, had just turned the corner of the Kursal. Her golden head was uncovered. In her hand she carried lightly a parasol of ultramarine blue.

"Here comes Liubóff Sergiévna!" exclaimed de Marly. All four men rose immediately. Earle had already recognized the newcomer.

Prince Tatárinoff went to meet her, and spoke a few words to her. They advanced together and joined the others, who exchanged with the newcomer the usual greetings.

"Monsieur Earle," said the Prince, "let me present you to my friend Liubóff Sergiévna—Mme. Babróva."

As Earle had been struck by the magnetic quality of Makedónsky's smile, so the sweetness of the glance of Liubóff Sergiévna caught and held captive in that second all his being.

He saw the low, wide brow with its curly, clinging ringlets of gold, and the high and delicate eyebrows, drawn slightly upward above the short and finely modeled nose with its thin nostrils; gazed into the deep violet eyes, with their slightly drooping lids, and at the mouth, with its adorable short upper lip, like that of a pouting child, and the little dimples on each side—

And at all the rich and beautiful clothing which framed her as gold frames splendid jewels—

Mechanically he found himself exchanging greetings.

She nodded graciously, and smiled, showing strong and perfect teeth of dazzling whiteness, with two little pointed canines on either side, which gave her smile an oddly piquant expression.

As Earle looked, Makedónsky went to her; stood before her, spoke to her, and she cast up at him a most alluring smile.

Suddenly Earle started up; said farewell to Prince Tatárinoff, who returned his adieux with punctilious politeness, removed his hat and pressed the American's hand cordially; bowed conventionally to Makedónsky, and cast a single glance at Liúba, who nodded farewell to him; in her sapphire eyes there was a momentary gleam of liking and regret.

And he went away, and all three of them looked after his strong, athletic figure as he walked, holding his stick loosely in the middle, lithely and firmly toward the Kursal.

"Why did he go away?" asked Liubóff Sergiévna, pouting. "One would think I were an ogre."

"Dazzled by too much beauty!" suggested Makedónsky.

"That *párin*¹ must be strong!" remarked Prince Tatárinoff. "I saw him in the lake this morning. He was in the very middle and swimming back from the other side. He swam with the overhand stroke, and his bare arms rose and fell like piston-rods. And fast! like a *Kuriérsky* (express train). He was across in five minutes. When he swam back into the enclosure, and climbed out, I saw that his body was a mass of muscle."

"I'm pretty strong myself," asserted Makedónsky calmly.

"We all know *your* exploits, Count," replied the Prince suavely. "You are an exception among Russian men. But that American has what I have always liked, the cult of the body, which has its home in England. That's why I am having my son educated there. I want him to catch the spirit. Sport and fair play. It would be the regeneration of our race if it could be widely enough spread. In Russia it's just beginning—tennis and football and hockey." (He pronounced "*fút bôl*" and *góki*, like all Russians.)

"And already encountering obstacles," observed de Marly, with his grave smile, "I read a long editorial in the *Yúzhny Krái* only yesterday, attacking the new tendency, and insisting on the predominance of the brain over the body."

"That editor is a criminal!" declared Makedónsky. "The trouble with Russia is—I mean the *Intelligéntsia*, of course; the peasants are as strong as oxen—that they neglect the body completely. I have always thanked my father for the education he gave me. What we need in Russia is strength, and not intellect. We have intellect enough already, intellect *par dessus les oreilles*! Everybody is educated, and over-educated. Everybody lives in a strange, artificial, hothouse world of books and interminable talk. What Russians need is to learn how to live, to live in the world of men and women, to live in Nature and with her, and to act instead of talk. Act wrongly, act any way, but *act*. What do *you* think, Liubóff Sergiévna?"

"I think as you do, Maksím Antónich," replied Liubóff Sergiévna. "We are in this world to make the best of our opportunities, and not to sit at home and watch life from afar."

"*Akh! Góspodi!*" she cried, with a gesture out and upward to the green and rustling trees, gilded by the golden shafts of sunlight. "The world is so beautiful! *Vive la vie!*"

Makedónsky cast down on her a whitely flaming gaze; started to speak, and ceased abruptly.

¹ Chap.

Liubóff Sergiévna had turned her head and was gazing intently after a group of people who had just passed by the Kursal.

"Do you see some one you know?" asked Prince Tatárinoff.

"Yes. No. I don't know her. It was a girl whom I met at the station yesterday morning. She cast at me such a strange glance just now! I wonder who she is?"

"I can tell you that," said de Marly. "If you mean the tall girl in the red dress. She arrived at the Sanatorium late last night and her name is Anastásia Aleksándrovna. She comes from Warsaw, and she told Evgénia that she was a 'close friend' of Anatól Malinóffsky, and that she 'had been' a dramatic artist. For further information, I refer you to Vera."

"An actress!" cried Liubóff Sergiévna with interest. "I adore actresses and actors! I must make her acquaintance."

"You will not get much out of *her* acquaintance!" interposed Makedónsky, so contemptuously that all gazed up at him in astonishment.

"Why? Do you know her?"

"I? No. How should I know her? But I know and have known many actresses. I was speaking, of course, in general."

3

The American a little later was sitting on the high Kursal balcony, which was quite deserted; gazing, as he smoked, across the wide, green, sunlit gardens of the official gardener, who reaped a harvest, thousands of rubles every summer, from the cottagers.

The flowers were very beautiful, growing in their round symmetrical beds, blues and purples and scarlets, pinks and golds; and from them the warm breeze wafted up to his nostrils a strong and pleasing fragrance of moist, sun-warmed earth, mingled with the penetrating perfume of many fair and perfect children of the flower-world: roses, pinks and mignonette, geraniums, peonias and tulips, the bourgeois gillyflower and the dainty bluebell, and green exquisite ferny stuff, and morning glories, and asters and sweet peas.

As he sat there two people came quickly around the corner, not seeing him, and two voices, a man's, deep and growling, a woman's, of a peculiar, bell-like resonance, floated up to his ears.

"I am not afraid of him. Let him do his worst. I will tell my people all about it, and you shall be protected."

"O, Tóssia! I am so frightened. I am such a coward, you

know. And he is a terrible man. You don't know him. I told you how cold-bloodedly he killed my husband—"

"Sh!"

The two voices suddenly ceased—the two who had been talking went by in silence with averted heads. Earle, through the open trelliswork of the balcony, saw that Anatól Borísovich was accompanied by the tall and slender girl in red. And he saw something else. Vera de Marly and her sister, Nadiézhda, met Anatól and the girl in red halfway between the Kursal and the Park entrance. Anatól, grim and silent, touched his cap and passed on. Nadiézhda openly turned around, put up her lorgnette and cast a glance after him. When she passed the Kursal her dark, capricious face was flaming; she looked away as she caught Earle's gaze. She did not even see his salutation.

The crowd of promenaders had again invaded the Park. The orchestra tuned up and played selection after selection from its repertory. Already, before the last number, the afternoon throng commenced to pour out of the Park. At the half-hour the vast enclosure was again emptied as though by magic; the proscenium was bare, the esplanade and avenues and open-air restaurant deserted. Only one solitary figure still sat far off, on a rustic bench half lost amid tall grasses, near the park exit leading to the grove.

There she sat, half bent over, drawing lines and figures on the gravel of the small cleared space before her. She must have heard the music stop, and the distant ringing of the final bell; but still she remained bent over, drawing figures in the gravel with the steel tip of her parasol, and made no motion to rise and go.

Finally, with a long sigh, she rose and walked slowly back to the esplanade, putting up her sunshade to keep off the glare.

The esplanade was quite deserted. She seated herself again for a moment on a bench not far from the Kursal. From the stairs of the Kursal balcony, a man dressed in blue and wearing a broad-brimmed panama hat descended, caught sight of her and came slowly toward her.

They greeted one another quietly; he threw himself down beside her without a word. Around them burned the red resplendency of the sunset. She tilted her sunshade to keep it off; the scarlet lining cast a rosy glow upon her oval cheeks and lighted crimson fires in her deep gray eyes.

Earle pulled down the flexible brim of his panama, kindled a fresh cigarette. His hands plunged deeply into his trousers pockets, he stretched out his long, lithe limbs and smoked fiercely.

"Stepán Geórgeevich, do you remember our conversation only this morning?" Eléna asked, after a long interval.

"Yes."

"And what I told you about my first ball—and the officer who danced with me?"

"I remember."

"He is here now. In Slaviánsk! I have just been talking with him!"

He cast at her a swift glance. "I knew it," he rejoined quietly.

"You knew it?"

"Yes. Have you forgotten that I was an unintentional eaves-dropper when Makedónsky first spoke to you in the Park? When you told me of that episode in your girlhood, I immediately guessed the identity of the fascinating officer whom you met at your first ball."

"He remembered me after four years' time." Pride rang in the clear young voice. "He came to me in the Park before every one, and sat beside me, and talked to me. And again this afternoon!"

"In view of certain admissions, that opens possibilities."

The words were light enough in themselves, but the gaze that Earle turned on her was somber, in marked contrast with the triumphant joy that shone upon Eléna's face.

"I need hardly ask you if you still feel the magnetism you spoke of? That also I have divined."

"I don't mind telling you. Yes. Even stronger than before!"

"If it makes you happy, I am glad for you," said Earle gently.

He smoked silently for a few moments, gazing straight before him, with frowning brows.

"Stepán Geórgeevich!"

He looked up with a start.

"Yes."

"Why are you so strange?"

"Strange?"

"Yes. You are absent-minded. I don't believe you're a bit interested in what I told you."

"I am. Really I am!" he protested.

"Then why are you so silent?"

"I don't know. Or, rather, I do know."

"Won't you tell me?"

"I also met some one in the park."

"You——? When?"

"This afternoon."

"A woman, I suppose?"

"Yes, a woman."

"Really? Who was it?"

"Her name is Liubóff Sergiévna——"

"Liúba? Did you meet her? She is an old schoolmate of mine, you know. But why——"

He looked up eagerly.

"Your schoolmate? Then you know her well?"

"Why yes. I know her very well. Naturally. We were practically brought up together. She, as the daughter of Evgénia Yermoláevna, of course——"

"The daughter of Evgénia Yermoláevna?" Earle looked amazed and incredulous.

"Yes. Didn't you know it?"

"No. How could I know it? She was introduced to me simply as Madame Babróva. I can scarcely believe it."

"It is true, nonetheless."

The American was stunned. After a moment:

"Do you know her well?"

"Yes."

"Friends?"

"No."

"May I ask why not?"

"I have not seen much of her in recent years. She married, you know—a small district judge—whom she left after a few months . . . And then she went abroad, and lived several years in Paris——"

"Don't you like her?" he asked, with a keen glance.

Eléna was silent for a moment, then replied decisively:

"No."

"Why not?"

"For various reasons. Do *you*?"

"I think I am in love with her," admitted Stephen Earle.

"Oh!" Eléna laid her hand impulsively on his sleeve; a strange expression came upon her face. She opened her lips to speak, then closed them resolutely.

And a long silence fell between them, which Eléna was the first to break.

"Do you remember what we said this morning?"

"About what?"

"That no matter what happened, we would remain friends?"

"Yes. And I meant it."

"So did I."

She held out her hand frankly and spontaneously; he clasped it; their eyes met, full of loyalty and affection.

"It is time to go home." Eléna rose. "No, don't come with me, Stephen. I can call you that now, you know."

Silently he stood and watched her go.

After a while he turned, and went for a stroll around the Park.

Having nothing better to do, he finally went back to his villa. The whitewashed walls of his new home oppressed him with their brightness. He tried to read, to write, to smoke, and failed to derive solace from any of these expedients. After a while he went out again, and undertook, *faute de mieux*, a little tour of exploration behind the Yermoláeff villas. But this excursion proved to be of small comfort to his soul. Behind a flowering syringa-bush, first of all, he stumbled over the *dvórník* (yard-janitor), sprawled out upon his back, dead drunk. Then, near the kitchens, where the white-capped, pock-marked chef presided, he came upon Evgénia Yermoláevna. Garbed in her flaming capote, she was berating in thunderous tones a thin, sickly-looking woman with a suspiciously red nose. It appeared from Evgénia's fierce and reverberating insults that this was Vassa, the Sanatorium washwoman, and that she had gone off to the steppe on a drunken spree with Simon, the *dvórník*, whom Evgénia threatened to thrash with her own hands if she got hold of him (Earle grinned when he thought of the syringa-bush), and with Avdótia and Marfúsha, two of the kitchen maids.

"Everybody asking me for clean sheets and clean towels," Evgénia boomed, "and she disappearing for two days, filling her worthless belly with vile vodka; and when she is reproached, '*Takóe oskorblénie!*' (such an insult). 'And if we drink, we drink on our own hard labor'; the fine lady . . . vile pig . . . and swine . . . etc., etc., etc." Earle, disinclined to hear more, wandered on without attracting the volcanic Evgénia's attention, for which he was duly thankful.

"*Akh, Russia!*" he muttered, as he remembered the intimidated, cowering creature. "God, I am sorry for these people!"

So he had always been sorry, in his travels afoot from North to South, through the vast, semi-Oriental land, for all the woe and wretchedness and sordid vice, for the eternal pain of the Russian heart, which fed the eternal desire to forget.

He wandered slowly on again, and prepared to issue from the enclosure. As he passed a big villa, facing the grassy square which abutted on the steppe, a woman sitting on the high

balcony sent him a little cry, and waved her hand toward him. He looked up.

It was Liúba Yermoláeva, who sat, dressed in a lacy pink *négligé*, before a table on which a big silver *samovár* was steaming. She was leaning back and smoking a cigarette. The beauty of her pale face, of her brightly glimmering golden hair, of her gleaming sapphire eyes, smote him. . . . Obeying some obscure impulse, he bowed coldly and formally, and went his way.

His heart ached . . . ached like the heart of Russia. . . .

4

The spacious, high-raftered dining room of the Sanatorium was brightly lighted by lamps set at each end of the long tables.

There was a great craning of necks that evening when a young woman came in and took her seat. Tall and graceful, dressed now in baby blue, she had a pale, rather tired-looking face, with big, velvety eyes, a slightly *retroussé* nose, and obviously painted lips.

"A new arrival," went round the winged word. "Just arrived. . . . First time she has been in the dining room. An actress, they say—called Anastásia Aleksándrovna— From Siberia; yes. A friend of Anatól Malinófsky. . . ."

Earle sat obliquely across from this new arrival, to whom he was duly introduced. Eléna was by his side, with Ekaterína and her daughter Liubóff (Mússia) beyond. Grigóri was absent.

"Perhaps you would prefer to be at the other table." Eléna turned to Earle with her frank smile, a new softness in her manner. "I think it is rather my fault that you are here. I told Evgénia Yermoláevna that you and I are friends."

"And you did well! . . . I am relieved not to have to listen to the *boltoynyá* (gabble) of the Prokurór."

"Of whom are you speaking?" Anastásia Aleksándrovna leaned across the table, with a houri's smile.

"Of the Prokurór," replied Mússia, in her most disagreeable manner. She had already taken a strong dislike to Tóssia's "friend."

Anastásia Aleksándrovna turned in her chair and cast her glance of black velvet diagonally across the room to where the Prokurór, howling and arguing, sat with his back turned.

"He is a very interesting man, your Prokurór," she remarked, in her rich and vibrant voice.

Ekaterína raised eloquent eyes to heaven; Eléna choked;

Mússia glared and sniffed; Earle looked at her with a certain contempt; Tóssia—

Ah, Tóssia! His gloom had never been more intense. . . .

"He makes me think of a certain friend I had in Siberia," babbled on the unconscious Anastásia Aleksándrovna—"A very dear friend. I met him at Irkútsk. . . . I was playing there, you know, the Revisór."

Ekaterína, furious, scolded Marfúshia for bringing the *borshch* (cabbage soup) cold.

Tóssia got up and went to smoke, according to his custom, between-course, on the terrace.

Anastásia Aleksándrovna started to narrate more of her experiences in Siberia. But Mússia had already had enough.

"I heard that Makedónsky, the hero of Port Arthur, had arrived in Slaviánsk," she began. "They say he made a great sensation in the Park. Did any of you see him?" She addressed her hearers in general.

"I saw him," replied Eléna quietly.

"Indeed! Is he as handsome and fascinating now as he was three years ago?"

"Quite."

"Makedónsky is an honor to Russia," affirmed Sófía Ivánovna, in her loud and energetic way. "I remember how the papers praised him for his bravery in the Japanese War."

"Such men are exceptional in our army," added Mússia. "The officers of the Tsar are usually such a weak and useless lot."

"They showed what they were in the Japanese War," said the Cossackess, from beyond Anastásia. "My husband told me that he heard from an officer of high rank while passing through Siberia that the soldiers used to shoot their officers. 'We used to tremble in every battle,' he said, 'not because of the enemy, but from the constant threat of death behind. Hundreds of Russian officers ended that way.'"

"Dissipated and inefficient!" boomed Sófía. "A characteristic development of our bureaucratic system."

"God pity Russia if we ever have another war!" exclaimed Mússia. "With any of the European powers, I mean. With our degenerate officers and our ill-trained, insufficiently-fed and badly equipped soldiers, we could no more stave off invasion than we could fly."

"Are you thinking of the Germans?" asked Earle, interested.

"The Germans; yes. . . . Germany is a threat hanging continually over Russia's head."

"Their army is certainly one of the most efficient in the world. . . . I went all over Germany. I visited most of the big fortresses, like Ehrenbreitstein, by special permission. . . . I was very much impressed."

"And we have the same system; Kaiserism, bureaucracy and militarism; that's the strange part of it!" said Mússia. . . . "It's our *human* material that is at fault."

"The personal equation," Earle translated. "But tell me," he addressed Mússia— "Are you Russians actually *afraid* of the Germans?"

"Afraid? Certainly not!" interposed Ekaterína indignantly. "Our nation is one of the bravest in the world. But we *anticipate*—that's another matter. . . . Do you think the Germans hide their designs?—not they! I shall never forget how furious I was at that German officer in Badenweiler— Do you remember, Mússia? . . . 'The trouble with your country, Frau von Malinóffsky,' said he, with that intolerable, conceited German smile—you know the kind, I dare say—is that as a nation you have no discipline, no self-control. . . . You belong to the *feminine* races of mankind."

"'Indeed,' I answered, foaming inwardly, though I tried to keep my calm. 'Perhaps you Germans might take over Russia and give us a few lessons, so that we might improve our national character with such good teachers.' Do you remember what he answered, Mússia? It nearly took my breath away. . . ."

"*Russland ist NOCH NICHT unser!*"¹ said he, with that intolerable Prussian smile.

"Mama was so angry she got up and left the room," added Mússia. "She wouldn't even let him kiss her hand."

"'Küss' die Hand! Küss' die Hand, gnädige Frau!'"² said he," Ekaterína finished. "'Küssen Sie die Hand einer DEUTSCHEN Frau!'"³ I said to him as I turned my back on him; 'MEINE Hand dürfen Sie nicht küssen!'"⁴ And I meant it, too. . . . I never exchanged another word with him for the rest of my stay at Badenweiler. Intolerable *Niémtsy!*"⁵

"Russia is too big ever to become a German province," Earle interposed, to soothe her soft and trembling rage. "And Russia knows too well the German methods ever to allow herself to fall

¹ "Russia is *not yet* ours!"

² Kiss the hand, dear lady.

³ Kiss the hand of a *German* lady—

⁴ *My* hand you may not kiss!

⁵ Germans. Literally, the mute ones.

into their power. Look at their actions in the North German Polish provinces—how they have systematically stamped out the Polish element.”

“Yes, if Poland ever falls into German hands, she will regret the hated Russian rule,” confirmed Mússia. “God pity her if the Germans ever get to Warsaw. . . . What?” She stopped suddenly as Ekaterína made a gesture.

Following her mother’s indignant gaze, Mússia’s eyes fell on Anastásia Aleksándrovna. Half turned in her chair she was engaged in exchanging a long, intent glance with the Prokurór, who had also turned.

“Simply *scandalous!*” muttered Ekaterína, glaring indignantly through her round gold spectacles at Earle, who was openly amused. The tenseness of the situation, luckily, was relaxed by the long delayed arrival of the second course, and the return of Anatól.

“Who *is* she, anyway?” murmured Earle *sotto-voce* to Eléna, under cover of the rattle and clash of the dishes.

Eléna shrugged her shoulders. Her gaze fixed itself on the palely beautiful countenance of Anastásia with obvious dislike.

“Some friend of my brother’s. From Warsaw, it seems.”

“Does not Mme. Babróva take her meals here?” he asked, after a while.

Eléna turned a swift glance upon him.

“No. Liúba never eats in the Sanatorium. She takes her meals in her own villa.”

5

Ekaterína Ivánovna seemed ever to be plunged into some cauldron of continuously ebulliscent perturbation. If it wasn’t one thing, as she explained after dinner with tremulous verbosity to Evgénia, it was bound to be another.

This time it was “that actress”—a classification to which Ekaterína thenceforth clung.

“But who *is* the long-legged, lanky minx?” howled Evgénia, like a thunder-clap. “With her black mop of curls and her painted lips? And what, I beg, has she got to do with Anatól?”

Ekaterína “made with the hand.” “His ‘friend,’ *pozhdnuista*,¹ from Warsaw. Some military light o’ love, if *looks* are any indication! After you showed her the room, you remember, and she said she would take it till October, she came and talked to me on the terrace. A flood! I could make neither head nor tail

¹ If you please.

of it. . . . Siberia, and acting. 'I am a dramatic artist,' if you please, and Warsaw, and Tóssia. . . . 'I will tell you a secret, Ekaterína Ivánovna,' said she— 'Anatól and I are almost, almost engaged. . . . But it's a secret still, so you must not tell it. Perhaps some day I shall call you Mama!'"

"The silly, impertinent little *hussy*!" exploded Evgénia. "I would have slapped her face!"

"And Tóssia—what does he have to say about her?"

"Tóssia?" Ekaterína's displeasure overflowed. "Tóssia never has anything to say about anything. He's the most exasperating child I have. And the most unnatural son! Not a bit like his brother Pavlúsha . . . ah, he, at least, has my character! If only he would come back from China! Tóssia is even more silent, more drawn into himself, more gloomy and inhuman than his father!"

"But did he offer no explanations at all?" persisted Evgénia.

"He told me he met her at his Military Club, if *that* is an explanation. And that she was his friend, nothing more."

"Strange, all the same! . . . First thing we know Pavlúsha will come back from China with some chopstick-eating, squinting Geisha-girl, and present us to his *neviéstka*!"¹ Evgénia, though confused in her data, was so convincing that Ekaterína actually shuddered.

"And the airs she puts on with the family!" The sluiceways of Ekaterína's displeasure still poured forth a torrent unabated. "She actually *patronized* Borís at lunch! I could see her from my table with her black head thrown back, and her eyes gazing down at him from under the lids with that smile of hers which, in my opinion, no respectable woman would allow herself. . . ."

"Borís Vladímírovich is a hard proposition to take with smiles," chuckled Evgénia, or words to that effect.

"There are others not so hard," remarked Ekaterína significantly.

Evgénia turned on her her shrewd green gaze.

"Who, for instance?"

"That crazy Prokurór. He was turning in his chair all through dinner, staring at her, his eyes popping out of his head."

"Did she look back?"

"She *invited* it. . . . An *actress*. Imagine!"

"What does Eléna think of her?"

"I know not. . . . Eléna is like Papa too, in her own way. She

¹ Fiancée.

thinks a lot, and says little until she is sure. . . . She talked with her a few minutes at dinner. . . . With that American."

"*Amerikánets-tò!*" commented Evgénia, by the use of which simple suffix she gave utterance to a whole idea, viz. . . . 'He's quite a boy, that American, in my opinion; and what is yours?' "And how did the Chinese actress like *him*?"

"I don't think she took to him, for a wonder, nor he to her. . . ."

"And why for a wonder, if you please?" demanded Evgénia.

"Haven't you heard that a dozen women are in love with him? He's a regular *cavaliere servente!*"

"A cavaliery serpenty, or *not* a cavaliery serpenty, or any other accursed foreign lingo you want to pin on him," roared Evgénia, "he's got a face I like, and a sense of humor too, which is as good as a passport of character to me or to any one. . . . When he isn't stuck at that other table with you and Mússia and a lot of dead sticks without an idea in their heads, which sticks haven't, but never mind, there's always a joke and a laugh going around, or else some talk with sense in it, which is more than I can say of the ravings of that accursed Prokurór! And Eléna, does *she* like him?" concluded Evgénia unexpectedly.

"She says he is nice and interesting, and that they are already good friends."

"*More* friends!" snorted Evgénia, in a voice like a trumpet-blast. Ekaterína "made with the hand."

6

That evening Liúba Yermoláeva came over to the Malinóffsky's villa: a formal call. . . . There were, for a wonder, no other visitors that evening. (Anatól had taken "that actress" to the "service.") Evgénia, of course, was there, for either at the Sanatorium or at the Malinóffsky home, she spent all her evenings with her business associates and lifelong friends.

Liúba was dressed simply that evening, in a black dress with open throat, which made her fair pallor even more perceptible; and which, with her high-piled hair, framing in gold the gleaming sapphires of her eyes, gave her a new and unwonted aspect to Eléna, who gazed at her curiously, as at one whom for a full two years she had not seen, but of whose peripatetic she had often heard. For "Liúba" had almost become legendary in the family, whose moral outlook the righteous Ekaterína tyrannically directed, for all that a respectable woman should *not* be.

Since Eléna's earliest childhood, she remembered, her mother (despite her lifelong friendship for Evgénia, to whom, for many sterling virtues of heart and character brought out by the adversities of the passing years, she was sincerely attached) had resolutely forbidden Liúba's admission to the family circle, or her association with either sons or daughters outside. Liúba, warned Ekaterína solemnly, had no principles. And she would end badly. A girl who, at the age of fifteen, in short skirts and with braids down her back, had lovers! What else were they but lovers, with all their dancing in Evgénia's house, and their kissing-games that went on right under Evgénia's broad and tolerant nose? And walking with *malchishki* (young boys) in the University Gardens in the evening, completely unchaperoned! And utter ignoring of parental influence, of which, truth to tell, she received but little. Borís Vladímirovich was silent, though he, too, had formed his own conclusions in his own way. . . .

Since Liúba's marriage a new scandal, like some hidden spring, had set Ekaterína's tremulous volubility again in motion. And Evgénia had not even admitted that Liúba was going wrong. What—even admitting it rhetorically and for the sake of argument—could *she* do? In matters affecting her personal actions Liúba had long ago turned an utterly deaf ear to her mother, whose example, Evgénia only too well realized, had hardly been such as to enable her to play the rôle of Mentor now.

It was with these thoughts that Eléna gazed at Liúba that evening as they all sat out on the balcony together, talking. Liúba was telling of her music studies in Paris; of her sojourn in the Crimea. . . . She talked well, but languidly, in a low contralto voice which had a mysterious sweetness, and there was a quietness in her which Eléna had not observed before. Several times Eléna caught Liúba's glance, in which shone ever that curiosity akin to her own. . . .

After a time Liúba said she must go to her villa, as she felt weary after her long journey. . . .

"Eléna, will you see me to the gate?" she asked abruptly, as Eléna held out her hand.

"You look very well, Eléna," said Liúba again, as they walked up the dark path together. "I envy you!"

"Envy me? For my health?"

"Yes, in general; but for that too. . . . I am often ill. . . ." responded Liúba, in response to Eléna's polite question. . . . "Don't you see how pale I am? I wish I had my mother's health. Or yours!"

"I lead a quiet life."

Liúba cast at her a quick glance through the darkness.

"Yes. . . . And I a feverish one. Or you, a good life . . . and I, a bad one; is that what you mean? Oh, you needn't protest; it's true. . . . Excitement—excitement . . . it's about all I live for . . . and it is wearing me out. 'Burning life,' they call it in Peter."

"Do you think it is worth while?" asked Eléna gravely.

"Yes. . . . It is all Life can offer . . . to one like me. You, I suppose, are so calm and cool-blooded . . . restlessness, fever, wildness, temptation, sin; they are all unknown words for you, I suppose."

Eléna did not answer. . . . They were at the gate. . . .

"Do you know that American . . . Airl . . . I believe his name is?" asked Liúba abruptly. Now Eléna knew one reason why Liúba had wished to be accompanied to the gate.

"Yes. . . . he is my friend," she answered deliberately.

"Your *friend*?" Liúba laughed, to Eléna's ear, disagreeably.

"Yes," was all she allowed herself to say.

"Is a man ever '*friends*' with a woman? A *young* woman?"

"Why not?" Eléna's tone held a certain aggressiveness.

"My doveling! when you have seen as much of the world as I . . ."

"Seeing the world would not shake my conviction."

"Would it not? Perhaps not! You and I were always different. You are the white, sweet-scented lily, and I the red passion-rose. . . . However . . . we were speaking of the American. . . . Has he been here long?"

"He arrived only yesterday."

"Only yesterday? And will he stay long, do you know?"

"I do not know. He told me he is a bird of passage. He stays only as long as he is interested."

"And is he interested now?"

"He is staying on. You seem 'interested' yourself," Eléna suggested.

"I like him," admitted Liúba frankly. . . . "I never hide my likes or dislikes, you know. You may even tell him I like him, if you care to."

"I am no one's go-between," returned Eléna. . . . Nor is it my custom to tell all I know. . . . Stephen Earle has already spoken to me about you, as a matter of fact."

"And you told him——" An anxiety came upon Liúba's pale face.

"Nothing!" Liúba heard conviction. She suddenly reached out her heavily-gemmed hand.

"Thank you, Eléna," she said; the quietness came upon her again. . . . "Good night."

"Good night."

Eléna went slowly back to the villa, up the dark, foliage-murmurous, sweet-scented path.

CHAPTER V

I

LATER on in the evening, according to long-established custom, the residents of the Yermoláeff villas assembled before the gate of the common entrance fronting the broad, grassy road, which terminated abruptly some few hundred feet beyond, at the edge of the steppe.

Chairs had been brought by the servants of the respective villas, and placed by their occupants in a wide circle on the soft and grassy ground.

Here, in the center of the group, sat majestically enthroned Evgénia Yermoláevna, attired flamboyantly in her enormous, flapping red capote, gorgeously beflowered. (The Slaviánsk legend had it that she wore nothing else beneath—but let us not pry into the intimate toilet of a lady, the thunder of whose bass could be equalled by old Daniloff alone, and whose pretensions to feminine flimmery had long ago vanished into the atmosphere of the yester year.) Other details of her costume were thick, blue stockings with wide, yellow rings, ungartered, falling loosely in labyrinthine folds; and flaring red morocco slippers, curling upward most Orientally at the toes, and so broadened at the sides that they resembled nothing so much as ships of transport, coal-barges or maritime vehicles akin.

As to the rest of Evgénia Yermoláevna's personality, seen at close range, her face was heavy, widening from temple to chin like a lamp-chimney; her scanty hair, coarse and gray, was twisted into the high, volcanic knot already described; her eyes, large, gray-green, intelligent and humorous, more than half hidden by drawn-down eyelids, were deeply sunken in their orbits; her mouth was enormous; her teeth scattering and set wide apart; her jaw prognathous, stronger than that of many men. Her figure can be disposed of in a word—a short, thick barrel, considerably wider at bottom than at top.

So she sat, roaring like a female chimpanzee, till all the forest opposite the Yermoláeff villas responded sonorously.

In the wide semicircle around her sat the rest of the Yer-

moláeff family—Evgénia's son Volódia, the veterinary; Prince Tatárinoff, and his daughter, Volódia's wife. Here also were the Malinóffskys and Grigóri Maksímich; the Gavrílkos; the Lébedeffs (Mária Aleksíevna, more resplendent than usual with a massive gold chain and locket, to say nothing of the blaze of rings upon her fingers), and Anna Isáevna, the slight, timid, gazelle-eyed Jewish girl whom Earle had met in the Park.

To this group, discussing matters of general interest in the daily round, was added a whole influx of other cottagers, living higher up at the border of the steppe; the Daníloffs and de Marlys, accompanied by their new American acquaintance, Stephen Earle, and their Greek friends and intimates, the Basilídes; with them Madame Caclamános, and her young daughter, Marússia.

The Basilídes family was numerous. There was old Madame Viktorine de Basilídes, a wrinkled, hooknosed, garrulous, remarkably intelligent old woman, whose virtuosity at the piano, despite her four-and-eighty years, was widely famed. A tottering, decrepit valetudinarian, with a white beard and a complexion of livid yellow, explained by his reputation as a *fin gourmet*, proved to be her brother. Two unmarried daughters, Marie and Polyhymnia, were each tall and angular, middle-aged, gray-haired, thin-lipped and exceedingly well-bred. Matviéi Stomátevich, the widowed composer, the reader already knows.

Greeted cordially and tendered seats by those of the cottagers whose villas were near, the newcomers seated themselves in the circle which, after new chairs were brought, found itself considerably enlarged.

Before them, etched in inky blackness on the silver softness of a moonlit sky, rose like a solid mass the thickly foliated trees of the Park grove. Around this grove in its entire length ran a low paling-fence; in this fence, at a point almost exactly opposite the Yermoláeff villas, a turnstile was arranged, giving access to and from the Park. At a distance of a few hundred yards above, another turnstile; at a corresponding distance below opened blackly the main entrance of what, for courtesy, was called a *skver* (square). From these three channels issued or entered from time to time dim figures; ladies, whose white and vaporous habiliments were palely silhouetted against the intense darkness of the wood; an occasional soldier, on his way to visit some servant sweetheart at one of the villas; physicians, clad in white linen, on their way to the Kursal Club; groups of young people on their way to the 'service' (in music), offered, to the holders of season tickets, in the Park at night.

Evgénia Yermoláevna was talking, and to an appreciative audience, for the Yermoláeffs in general, and Evgénia particularly, were noted from Slaviánsk to Rostóff for their discourse, racy, richly-flavored, vivid, picturesque, and violent.

She was relating—as usual—her troubles at the Sanatorium, in which the drunken, shiftless habits of the servants played a prominent part. That, she declared, was why the Doctor said her heart was sick, always worrying and fuming, and no one to realize what she had to go through daily. In a loud, continuous stream, she poured forth further tribulations, interspersed with inimitable descriptions and mimicries of the people with whom she came into contact—not to say collision. Fiercely she abused the maids, on whose morality she delivered an impassioned philippic:

“Sweethearting with those rotten soldiers at Slaviánsk City—half the night for kisses, and up at five. . . . And half of them hiding away some soldier’s brat in the village. . . . Oh, she knew them and their tricks; the vile, accursed rubbish; the swine, the carrion, the . . .”

“*Tishè, mat!*” (Softer, mother) roared her son Volódia, from the outer circle. This, it appeared, was a formula, consecrated by long custom. Whenever his mother roared too loudly, and her epithets and objurgations became too violent, Volódia, in accents as formidable as her own, roared for her to moderate her stentorian voice and her Rabelaisian frankness of expression. . . . To which suggestion, of course, Evgénia paid not the slightest attention, unless her breath gave out, which happened rarely.

Earle looked at her curiously as she sat there, howling like the female gorilla which she resembled. From Nadiézhda’s gossip in the Park that morning, he had inferred that when Evgénia was considerably younger she had been quite good-looking, and had had many lovers, officers and aristocrats, with all her peasant origin.

No one who had not been told of this would ever have suspected it, he thought, as he gazed at her short, squat figure, shapeless in the big red wrapper which she wore by predilection, at the broad, common face with the drawn-down lids; at the wide and sagging mouth. But then, of course, he realized that one must allow for “the irreparable outrage of the years,” for hard work, and the ills that flesh is heir to. Especially when . . .

After Evgénia’s dynamic outbursts had reached their logical end,

the conversation became general. Various phases of the social life in Petersburg, Moscow, Khárkoff were discussed. The Prokurór, in his frenzied, neurasthenic way, related some recent experiences in Finland. Many of his remarks, as usual, were frank to a point far beyond the established bounds of propriety. Mária Grigórevna, the Pope's wife, told how—several years before—she had met the notorious Raspútín, in the guise of a dirty, drunken tramp, in a country town in the Urals. . . . And how he had prophesied to her that the name of "Grishka" Raspútín would yet be famous; and how she had been impressed by his blazing eyes, and some strange power. . . . Earle noted the caution with which the others commented in the presence of the reactionary Prokurór. . . . It was clear that Raspútín and the Czarina scandal was a subject socially and politically taboo.

A man and woman came down the grassy street and joined the circle. It was Eléna Malinóffsky and Grigóri Dodónoff, who, it appeared, had attended a concert given by some mutual friend. Eléna was quite silent, and Grigóri had very little to say. It was surmised by Earle, who looked at Eléna keenly, that she and Grigóri had again been quarreling. Perhaps not. . . . But the girl's deeply glowing eyes and childish mouth were sad; she showed noticeable reluctance to answer the few questions asked by the little mother squirrel (who seemed to have her own surmises), and her whole bearing was dejected.

At Grigóri, tall and elegant and good-looking in his cold, blond way, as he seated himself on a corner of the bench before the gate and lighted a cigarette, Earle looked with growing disfavor. . . . A man who was engaged to such a beautiful and attractive girl as Eléna Malinóffsky, and who, far from appreciating her and doing her the homage which her personality deserved, neglected her, flirted with other women, and made his fiancée the object of public gossip, if not of ridicule—such a man, he swore to himself savagely, was nothing but a cad. . . . He was amazed—amazed that Eléna did not break with him irrevocably. . . . He believed she would.

He was aroused from his meditations by the voice of M. de Marly, who was having an argument with the Prokurór about *toská*.¹

"In connection with our mines, I have lived among them," M. de Marly was saying. "The peasants in the country districts are more vice-ridden and soul-sick than the proletariat, if that is possible. And the workmen of the cities are soul-sick and wretched

¹ Soul-sickness. The Russian neurosis.

enough, God knows! No, Gospodín Prokurór; I regret to have to tell you that your argument flies in the face of fact."

The Prokurór, furious, rose to pour forth contradictions, but his wife pulled him by the sleeve, and he subsided, muttering a word that sounded like "*foreignerth!*"

A general calm spread over these stormy waters, and conversation languished, but the faces of many of those present betrayed a wake of thoughts. The company was galvanized into new life by the arrival of Daniloﬀ and Dr. Malinóﬀsky, who had been playing *Vint* at the Casino. Daniloﬀ, charged, like a high-power dynamo, with stertorous and stentorian energy, hailed them in a voice of thunder, and immediately proposed an evening walk upon the steppe. . . . His flesh . . . his accursed flesh! . . .

Evgénia Yermoláevna, in tones as formidable as his own, took up this suggestion, which was supported by a number of others. Several declined, among them Eléna Malinóﬀsky. Some of the ladies went to their villas to get wraps to protect them from the night air on the steppe, which was apt to be chilly.

"I think I'll go and get a wrap also," said Vera de Marly. "Grigóri Maksímich, do you feel inclined to escort a weak and defenseless woman as far as the door of her villa?"

"With pleasure!" responded Grigóri with alacrity, as he threw away his cigarette. Earle's bearded lips curled as Grigóri and Vera—the latter chatting gayly and cynically as usual—moved out into the moonlight and crossed to the entrance of the Park.

"Meet you at the steppe, where the villas end, people!" called back Vera, in her sharp, clear accents, over her shoulder.

Earle rose suddenly and went to Eléna, who stood alone and silent, leaning against the frame of the gate.

"Mademoiselle Malinóﬀsky," he said gently, "would you like to do some one a great service this evening?"

The girl looked up. Sadness was in the gray eyes, and the small mouth was set in grave and brooding lines.

"If I can."

"Then reconsider your decision, and come out with me on the steppe."

"Won't you?" he asked persuasively, as she was silent.

"No. I don't think I will," she replied at last, slowly.

"Then at least let me stay and keep you company."

"If you really wish to, . . ." she consented, somewhat doubtfully.

"Good!" Earle lighted a cigarette and waited with her in silence until the others returned. Quite a large company soon

assembled, including even Evgénia Yermoláevna, who had complained of rheumatism, and Mária Aleksiéevna, the psychopath.

"Ready!" boomed Danfloff, like a thunderclap. "Moon full and evening perfect! . . . Moon full and evening perfect! Ideal for a stroll!"

In scattered groups and by isolated couples, the excursion started out.

3

The two who had remained behind sat down together on the empty bench. The grassy road was dark; the moon was now completely covered. Dark clouds hid the sky above the high poplars, which swayed, sighing in a freshening breeze, along the edge of the Park.

At first there was silence between them, like a mantle for their thoughts. After a while Eléna turned in the pale light, and gazed at him.

"Stephen!"

"Eléna?"

"Why did I let you stay to keep me company?"

"Because you are kind."

"Kind?"

"Yes. Because you feel that I am a foreigner in a strange country, and that I'm probably lonesome, and rather unhappy; and you feel sorry for me, and are willing to be bored with me for a while for humanity's sake."

Eléna smiled, somewhat wearily.

"If that is a sample of your ability to read psychology," she said, "it does not argue well of your penetration."

"How can I penetrate any one else's psychology when I can't even understand my own?"

"I'm sure you understand a lot about psychology," Eléna protested unbelievably.

"Why are you sure?"

"Because you have traveled so much and met so many different people. I envy you."

Earle laughed.

"Why do you laugh like that? You have such advantages, travel, liberty." There was real envy in the young girl's voice.

"You think travel is an advantage?"

"Why yes; certainly I think so. Do not you?"

"No! I think it is a kind of ambulatory Hell."

"What a strange phrase! Do you really mean you do not like to travel?"

"Precisely thus!"

"But, then, why do you travel?"

"I am a wanderer."

"But why do you wander?"

"To seek things."

"How interesting! How long have you been wandering?"

"About ten years. It will be five years this autumn since I last went home."

"Five years! Is it possible that you have been away from home so long?"

"Quite possible!"

"It is a long time to be expatriate," commented the girl. "Are you never homesick?"

"Yes and no."

"How—yes and no?"

"I am not at home in my own country. And yet. . . . Yes, I have been homesick."

"Then you have been unhappy?"

"In the cities."

"Why in the cities more than elsewhere?"

"Nature consoles me."

"And in the cities?"

"I have suffered."

"Won't you tell me why?"

"How can I?"

"Forget that I am a girl," she pleaded. "Speak to me as one human being to another. I would consider it the highest compliment you could pay me."

"It is hard for me to speak of it. . . . I have kept it to myself so long. Suppose that I have been wandering in a jungle . . . a jungle of red flowers . . . and longing . . . for something . . . let us say for white lilies before an altar."

Eléna turned her head and gazed at the dark profile beside her. She was silent for a while. Finally she raised her hand and laid it almost affectionately upon his sleeve.

"Poor Stephen," she said, almost in a whisper. "Now I understand why you have been unhappy."

He turned on her a smoldering gaze.

"You understand nothing!" His tone seemed almost contemptuous. "What can *you* understand?"

Eléna gazed at him for a moment in surprise.

"Have I no imagination?" she asked at length, with a touch of resentment. "Don't you even credit me with being intelligent?"

"It's not a question of intelligence."

"Say in plain words that I'm just a brainless, inexperienced young *ingénue*. . . . You forget, Monsieur Stephen Earle, that I am a Russian girl; that I have seen human misery, weakness, sin all around me since my childhood; that I have read everything in Russian from Dostoiévsky down—that I have understood and felt imaginatively every mad obsession that makes our Russian literature a chamber of pathological horrors; all these things you forget when you tell me so disdainfully that I cannot understand. . . ."

"I'll test you," said Stephen grimly.

"Very well, test me!" she challenged, defiantly.

"Why do I believe that human life is strange, and mad, and incomprehensible?"

"Because you have traveled, and *seen*. Because you have studied and thought. And because you have plucked red flowers."

"Why has Music inflicted on me a wound that will never heal?"

"Because it evokes for you—as for me—that *other* world . . . the land of the Ideal. The wound it gives is inflicted by a god."

"Or by a devil. Let me paint you a scene."

"I am listening." The girl sat with her hands folded in her lap, grave, silent and attentive.

"In Tangiers," he began slowly, "under the hot, velvety-black African sky, I sat one night cross-legged on an open balcony, alternately smoking a babbling water pipe and eating candy paste. . . . An Arab girl with tinkling bracelets on her arms and ankles crouched near me; a darkly pretty, elemental creature, greedy and covetous, who would have put a knife into me as readily as she kissed me. Imagine the scene: the narrow street below, shut in between rows of low, whitewashed houses; the Arabs in long burnouses gleaming whitely through the purple dusk, passing gravely back and forth; veiled Arab ladies.

"Then from a nearby house came the thin, penetrating note of a stringed instrument. And a wild, barbaric voice—a woman's voice—sang in guttural Arabic some passionately sad romance, while that soulless Arab girl, half reclining by my side, indolently sent out streams of white smoke from the long, coiled stem.

"Can you understand why I felt myself ten thousand miles from home—why I wished myself dead that night—and since then many nights——" He broke off suddenly.

Eléna did not reply at once.

"Yes," she said at last. "I understand it. You were weary to death of soulless passion and of bought caresses. You longed for home, for the kindly light of a lamp and for true love, hovering like a kiss around you. You long for them still."

Earle, uttering no word of confirmation or approval, asked his last question.

"Now tell me—why have I come to Russia?"

"You came to Russia because your soul is sick. Russia, the country of the soul-sick, fascinates you. . . ."

"It fascinates me—you are right."

"Yes, Russia is the land of the soul-sick," continued Eléna, wearily. "You have come to your own people. We are all soul-sick here."

A long silence fell.

"Stephen, do you feel like taking a turn in the Park?" asked Eléna after a while. "I feel restless. I can't keep still."

With a brief nod, he assented.

4

They walked across the grassy avenue and entered the Park through the revolving stile. The Park lights had been extinguished; beneath the trees lay inky blackness—they could scarcely see the path before them. Occasionally a shadowy figure passed.

At the turning to the right, near the stile, stood a gendarme, faintly illumined against the red light from the line of villas opposite. Earle noted his belt, containing a revolver-holster on either side, and his long sword-sheath, an apparition of sinister suggestion.¹

Eléna and Earle passed downward to the right, toward the exit which led diagonally across to the Daniloff villa.

Just as they reached the turnstile Eléna drew back suddenly, with a suppressed exclamation. Two figures stood just outside the Park in the full glare of the moonlight. One of the two—a woman, was in the other's arms, and the other was raining passionate kisses upon her face. Seeing at a glance that one was Vera de Marly and the other Grigóri Maksímich, Earle followed Eléna back into the shadow. Silently, side by side, they walked on together through the deep stillness of the nocturnal enclosure.

¹ The first Russian Revolution had been suppressed a few years before, at the cost of thousands of lives.

At the stile facing the Yermoláeff villas, Eléna paused and faced him.

"You have brought me home. Don't bother to come any further, thank you."

With a weary little gesture she gave him her hand, and as he looked down upon her in the pale light from the open road, he saw the wistfulness on her face. . . . Following a sudden impulse he raised her hand to his lips and held it there.

"Why?" he asked in a low voice, as she tried to withdraw her hand. "Have we not sworn pact of friendship, and must friends be as strangers?"

"I think I have become a pessimist to-night. I feel that all friendships, all human relationships, are futile. Life itself is worth a kopek, as we Russians say."

"I have often tried to persuade myself of that," he murmured, holding her hand still pressed to his lips, "but something always told me that I was wrong—and I believed it, and so must you!"

"In any event," she went on, with an attempt to laugh, "please stop kissing my hand. In Russia, as I have already told you, it is only the hand of *married* ladies that a man may kiss, otherwise it is improper."

"And the mouth?" His voice held to her ears something queer and caressing. "Do men never kiss that?"

"You saw!" she said bitterly. "Do you need to ask me that?"

In the silence that fell between them he divined, as he stood holding her hand, the sudden flurry of her heart, and she knew that he felt her trouble, and he knew that she knew it. For the old desire had come upon him again: and in her he felt a lassitude, a yearning for something, she knew not what—a moment of weakness, temptation, such as the best of women at certain moments may experience. . . .

"A quiet night!" She tried to withdraw her hand.

But he held it firm. Quite suddenly he put out his arms and drew her to him.

"No!" cried Eléna sharply, drawing away.

"Yes!" he insisted.

"O, Stephen—don't!" she pleaded.

"Yes!"

Weak and trembling, she was in his arms, upon his breast, her face upturned to him, and his lips were seeking hers and her lips were seeking his— And they met and clung in a long kiss. Then with a strangling sob she pushed him away, and fled through

the stile, which creaked in shrilling protest as she whirled around, ran quickly over the moonlit road, and was swallowed up in the black shadows of the Yermoláeff gate.

Earle straightened up with a sigh.

"She is nice," he murmured aloud in English, and then in Russian, "*Biednázhka!*" (Poor little girl.)

For he knew that this Russian girl was going through a time of storm and stress, and that she was very unhappy.

"I shouldn't have kissed her," he thought; "it wasn't fair. Why did I do it?"

"I know why," he thought after a moment. "Because I met Liúba to-day, and fell madly in love with her, and it stirred me emotionally, and I needed a woman's sweetness and a woman's kiss. . . . Just the same . . ."

He took out his silver cigarette case, and lighted a long-stemmed cigarette of very black and strong tobacco, which soothed him on his homeward way. And he lay in his bed in the dark and silent villa, hearing from afar the singing of some belated revelers—perhaps the returning cottagers—and smoked, and thought of all that his first day in Slaviánsk had brought to him.

CHAPTER VI

I

THE Vermoláeff party had just arrived at Sviatiya Góry. Stephen Earle was glad to get away from the leadership of the too energetic Evgénia; from the noise and comment of the excited pilgrims. He felt free, as one lightened of a burden, as he walked up the inclined causeway in the opposite direction from his fellow-travelers.

His hat drawn low over his eyes, the iron tip of his stick echoing against the cobbles of the street, he proceeded to the Monastery, where, to the undisguised amazement of the rest of the party, and against Evgénia's stentorian advice, he had decided to take a room.

The Monastery Inn was a high and massive building of rough granite, showing, by its medieval architecture—(the ponderous walls; the ogived windows and doors; the stone stairway, worn and hollowed by the tread of many feet; the cloistered coolness of the vaulted halls, wrapped in bluish gloom)—the length of time that had elapsed since its erection. Through these corridors he passed, his footsteps echoing reverberantly before and behind him, below and above, like a ghostly voice.

On his way he passed bearded men, clothed in black robes, girdled in at the waist, and wearing upon their heads conical black hoods, from beneath which long, golden hair, all rippling and glinting like the hair of women, streamed down their backs.

Feeling lonely and isolated, yet happy to be there, he turned off to the right into a corridor, where light glinted from an arched and oval door, and came out upon a small stone balcony, all trellised round with foliage and overlooking a spacious courtyard, which slanted sharply upwards, so medieval in aspect, with its irregular cobbles and littering of straw where horses stood tethered, with the antique fashion of the windows in the enclosing walls, and the crowd of unkempt, picturesquely-clad peasants and black-robed, long-haired monks passing busily back and forth, that he almost had to rub his eyes to believe that he was actually living in the present, and not in the past.

As he stood there gazing, a young and handsome monk, brown-eyed, red-cheeked, almost a boy, despite his luxuriant blond beard, contradicted by the mere golden down glittering faintly on his mobile lips, came out of the Monastery, and touched him on the shoulder.

"*Izvinitè, suddár*" (Excuse me, sir), he said, in a rich and virile voice. "Do 'they' wish to dine?"¹

Earle turned, and looked at his interlocutor with interest. Then he took out his watch and looked at it. Its needles marked nearly half past twelve.

"I came to take a room for a couple of days." He smiled at the handsome boy, who stood gazing at him curiously. "But perhaps I might dine first, if you will tell me where to go."

"Do 'they' desire to dine in the main refectory or on the balcony?"

"May one dine here?"

"Yes, *suddár*. Possible."

"Then by all means let it be here."

"Very well. What do 'they' desire?"

"What is there?"

"Not much, *suddár*. Our Inn is not for *gospodá* (gentlemen), like 'them.' All we have is thin *borshch* (cabbage soup), cold sausage, and *kvass*."

"A real monastic fare!"

The young monk smiled, showing white teeth, but made no comment.

Whereupon he turned and disappeared. He was gone for a long time.

"Your pardon, *bárin*," he said apologetically, as he put the tray down. "The Inn is so full, full to overflowing, and everything is topsy-turvy. It is very hard to get things from the refectory kitchen."

"I should have gone there——"

"No, *suddár*," interrupted the young monk. "It is better that the *bárin* eats here. There, they are just like animals, sweating, tearing, and bolting their food. *Muzhikí*, 'they' know. They have a little more money than the other pilgrims, that's all the difference."

As he spoke, he deftly whipped a snow-white cloth over the round table, laid the cover, knife, fork and spoon, and transferred the *borshch* and other edibles from the tray.

¹ Russian people of the lower class in Russia address their superiors in the 3rd person plural, as a form of respect.

"*Vot-s!*"¹ he announced, as he removed the tray and stood respectfully, while Earle took up his spoon and attacked with good appetite the steaming soup.

"Tell me," said Earle, after he had finished the soup, and the young monk stepped forward and began to serve the other viands, "how many pilgrims have you here?"

"In the Inn? Nearly five hundred."

"And in Sviatíya Góry?"

"In Sviatíya Góry? Thirty thousand, they say."

"So many? A whole world!"

"Yes, *suddr*. They stream to us each year, from all parts of Russia."

"And you—do you have to work very hard? Have you been here long?"

"Not so very long. I joined the Brothers only a year ago. There are many Brothers serving besides me."

"Isn't the work disagreeable to you? You don't look like a waiter."

The monk lowered his lustrous eyes.

"In our community, *suddr*, we all have our work to do," he explained with proud humility. "One is a shoemaker, another is an ikon-painter, another is a cook, or a waiter. I became a waiter for my own reasons."

"What reasons, if I may ask?"

The young monk hesitated. . . .

"*Bárin*," he said gravely. "It is perhaps my sin. I still love the world and life. I like to watch the people come and go."

"And are you—the Brothers have withdrawn, then, from life?" The monk lowered his eyes again.

"*Suddr*, I may not know. Some of the Brothers are Saints, who pass their days in penance and fasts and vigils. Others——"

"Others——?" Earle prompted, as the boy hesitated.

"I may not know," repeated the young monk. He gazed at Earle gravely, then turned and disappeared. Meanwhile Earle discussed meditatively the sausage and cheese, and drank the *kvass*—he scarcely raised his eyes as the monks passed in and out of the door.

In the afternoon, guided by the young monk who, at the American's request, had obtained leave of absence from his duties, Earle went through the Monastery.

¹ Here you are, sir. (S final = 'sir.')

They passed through wide and arching courtyards, filled with the workshops and outbuildings of the community; up mildewed stone steps; out over broad terraces; into cathedral temples, where resplendent altars glittered with gold and jewels, and where granite walls were inlaid with mosaic work depicting in Byzantine style the martyrdom of the early Christian saints. Here and there hung the faded, full-length portrait of some grave, bearded Archbishop or Archimandrite, clad in sable garments, of a curious refinement of feature: the price, thought Earle, of many toils and vigils, and solitary meditations, and the victory of the Spirit over the Flesh. And then they visited the Monastery Treasury, beneath the altar of the Cathedral Temple, filled with ecclesiastical vestments and priceless altar-cloths, with golden censers and Eucharist vessels of silver, miters and crowns, and marble tombs.

Then up again across the echoing church, through the stained windows of which the afternoon sunset fell straight in vivid reds and blues, like the warp of a Persian carpet, on the cool gray flags, and out with the crowds of others, into the warm sunlight which filled their bodies, chilled by the dank coldness of these multiple temples and vaults, with a grateful warmth. They found themselves on the broad ledge of the Uspénsky Cathedral, forcing a narrow lane between the loathsome beggars, who covered the high, wide stairway like a cancerous growth.

"Alms, gentleman! Gentleman, for the love of Christ, give a kopek. Alms, gentleman!"

And cunning eyes, and wrinkled faces, and purple lips smiled sweetly, imploringly. Earle stopped, and gave now here, now there, a copper coin; and the whole crowd rose to its feet like a single wave and almost mobbed him; he had to fight his way down and across the exterior court.

"You would better go up through the *Peshchéri* to-morrow," said the young monk. "With the procession. It will be too dark to see the view from the mountain top this afternoon."

"What are the *Peshchéri*?"

"They are what you might call the catacombs—only they are hollowed out in the solid rock of the mountain, upward, not down. The view from the top is magnificent."

"How do 'they' like our Holy Mountain?" asked the monkish guide, as the two walked by the shops again and up the steep and cobbled street that led to the Inn.

"Remarkable! Magnificent!" Earle cried, and the young Monk smiled naïvely, well content.

"How long ago——" began Earle, but stopped short as a great crowd of sightseers poured out of an isolated temple and came to meet him. At their head strode the resolute and martial Evgénia, waving her umbrella masterfully, the sable plumes of a catafalcic hat dancing triumphantly.

"Ah, ha! We've ferreted you out!" she cried exultantly, as she caught sight of the American walking with the young Monk. "That *Amerikánets* thought that he would give us the slip, but we tracked him down. Now, you foreign renegade and Judas, give an account of yourself, or by all the devils of——"

"Gently, Mother, gently!" came Volódia's reverberating voice over the heads of a dozen people.

They all surrounded him, laughing and talking, persuading him to come with them to the Ribopierre Hotel. Blue, and brown and black eyes flashed, and red lips curved and smiled mobilely. And Piótr Samóilovich howled down his protestations when he sought, laughing good-humoredly, to extricate himself from the charming circle. But most of all he was affected by the sweetness of one face, which gazed at him oddly, with silent appeal. So he consented to go with them, at least for the present. But when he turned to take farewell of his companion, he found that the young monk had slipped away in the confusion; so with the crowd Earle departed, without further ado.

3

Liúba Yermoláeva lingered behind, walking so slowly that he could not avoid catching up with her.

Again he felt the strange disquiet of her presence; and now, as before, he was silent, and could find no words to say. She cast at him several little glances, as if waiting for him to speak; finally she said:

"Why did you run away from us like that?"

"I didn't mean to run away."

"Piótr Samóilovich said it was because you didn't want to live in the Ribopierre Hotel. Was that really the reason?"

"Did you doubt it?"

"I don't know. Was it?"

"Not wholly."

"I thought so. Then why did you abandon us?"

"Must you know?"

She gazed at him intently.

"Not if you don't wish to tell me," she replied, and fell silent,

as they walked slowly up the sloping causeway toward the low, rambling structure dignified by the undeserved title of the Ribopierre "Hotel."

Near the entrance she turned and faced him, with smiling lips, revealing her white and perfect teeth, with the two little canines, the sight of which excited somewhere in his brain, again, that first inexplicable emotion.

"Won't you come in?" she invited.

"No!"

His surly tone effaced the alluring smile from the lovely face.

"What is the matter?" she asked abruptly.

"How do you mean?"

"Why are you so strange?"

"Strange?"

"Yes. You are artificial—unnatural."

Resentment flashed suddenly in Earle's eyes; he opened his lips—then closed them in a hard and compressed line.

"I hope you will enjoy the Procession of the Cross," he answered coldly. With a slight inclination of his head, he swung away.

Liúba stood there a moment, taken aback by his unceremonious departure, then impulsively ran after him.

"Wait!" she cried imperiously.

Earle turned. She came to him quickly.

"Why do you run off like that, so abruptly?" she demanded; and now it was her face that looked resentful. "Why do you take offense so easily? I did not mean that you were artificial, in general; I mean that you are so with *me*!"

"I did not find fault with what you said, did I?"

"Your face did; your actions, too."

She put her hand upon his arm.

"One would think we were quarreling!" she added, with an odd smile. "You and I, for some reason, seem to be at cross-purposes. Why are we at cross-purposes, American?"

"I don't know."

"Look at me!" she commanded.

Unwillingly he raised his eyes, and gazed into hers.

"You are a bear!" she said softly. "A sulky English bear. But I will tame you, yet!"

"Will you?" He smiled suddenly. "I hope you will have success. Other women have tried to before."

"I shall succeed!" declared Liúba confidently.

"I challenge you!"

"You should never challenge a woman—it is dangerous!"

"I like danger!"

"I believe you. But don't forget what I told you; I am going to tame you. Not by force—(her voice purred velvet soft, and languorous)—with love."

"Away, Delilah!" rejoined Earle, in a mocking tone.

"You will kneel to me yet, my Samson," prophesied Liúba, calmly, "you will be the slave of my caprice!"

"Never!"

"Always! Or, at least, as long as I wish."

Earle laughed aloud, but Liúba still smiled mysteriously.

"What nonsense we are talking," she exclaimed, with a slight shrug of her dainty shoulders. "I think you're a dear, if you want the truth. You interest me terribly; you fascinate me. I wish I could learn to know you better."

"I'll not deny that I think you're a wonderful creature," repaid Earle, magnanimously. "And I would like to know *you* better, also."

Her small hand gave his arm a little squeeze; he saw from her face that she was well content.

"I dare you to invite me to dinner at the Monastery Inn," she challenged.

"Dare me—why dare me?"

"I told you why. Because it's dangerous!"

"Didn't I tell you I liked danger?"

"So you did. Then you will be quite in your element!" declared Liúba, ironically.

"Quite! When will you come—to-day?"

"I can't, to-day. To-morrow. After the Procession of the Cross. Where will you be?"

"On one of the upper balconies. Ask for the monk Anastasius. He will show you where to come."

"Agreed. And good-by, till then." She held out her small gloved hand, and when he took it, she did not at once withdraw it.

"Good-by!" Their eyes met.

"Say 'good-by, *Liúba*,'" she commanded.

"Good-by, Liúba!" repeated Earle at once, with a defiant gaze at the alluring, lovely face.

Liúba bestowed on him a last smile, filled with calm confidence and triumphant power, gave his hand a hard little squeeze, and went.

Earle, hot and dusty, decided to go to the bath-house fronting the river, and have a good, refreshing swim, which, so far, he had never missed a single day. So from his valise he extracted his one-piece swimming costume, which he had purchased at Ostend; and taking it on his arm, walked slowly down the slanting causeway and across the bridge, crowded with peasants and rumbling carts, and the throng of sightseers.

With little difficulty he found the bath-house, and with the help of a half-ruble piece persuaded an attendant with a shock of towy hair and wearing a black blouse, who looked like a criminal, to open the locked door opening upon the river.

He drove the criminal out and hasped the cabin door; put on the bathing costume, climbed from the low steps onto the threshold of the outer door, stood a moment, guessing the depth, then took a clean, far, slanting dive. . . .

Lazily he lay, face downward in the water, arms stretched wide, floating like a human log, watching the sandy bottom shimmering palely golden through the blue blur of waters. . . . And his thoughts were slow and calm, and the body and soul of him were cool and quiet.

Now he struck out, hand over hand, down the swift river. After several minutes of glorious speed he returned, fighting the strong current lustily.

Across the river he caught a glimpse of Evgénia Yermoláevna, in a boat loaded to the gunwales with pretty girls, who waved and cried to him. Evgénia, in stentorian tones, was berating the crest-fallen Piótr Samóilovich, who was trying to row, and catching many crabs. . . . A second boat passed him, in which sat Liúba Yermoláeva and Prince Tatárinoff, rowed by two sturdy boatmen. Liúba waved her handkerchief to him, and he raised a brown and muscular arm high out of the water, and waved a response.

Earle spent the rest of the day prowling around the Monastery. Healthily tired out, he partook of a frugal supper, smoked for an hour or so, and then went up to his bare, cell-like cubicle, undressed and lay on the iron cot, listening to the melancholy wash of the river that ran below. Within a half-hour he was sound asleep in the dark little room. And he dreamed of Liúba Yermoláeva. . . .

CHAPTER VII

I

THE day of the Khréstny Khod (Procession of the Cross) dawned bright and clear. The sun was blinding gold; the golden river was bespangled with a robe of shimmering jewels; the high and rolling shores sent forth faint, melodious sighs as the gentle breeze swept them.

The vast throngs of people, crowded into Sviatfya Góry, shared the gladness of external Nature. Almost before the dawn the pilgrims were on foot, hastening to the riverside, to secure a more advantageous position than the lazy ones who preferred to lie abed.

The Procession of the Cross had been set for eight o'clock, but it was nine before the Ceremonial got under way. A high mass was celebrated in the great Cathedral before the procession started.

The triune altar arch sent forth a golden blaze. The Cathedral was packed to suffocation. The congregation—mostly composed of brawny, sweating peasants—crossed themselves piously as the double choirs of monks upon either side the altar sang and answered one another. Their somber robes contrasted with the resplendent *ikonostáss*;¹ their long hair, brown or golden, had been elaborately waved and rippled for the occasion; one of the monks had so elaborated his coiffure that his thick, reddish hair stood out fully six inches on either side of his thin, dark face, making him resemble some minister or nobleman of the time of Louis XIV.

In the choir stood young boys, who sang in their high, sweet, thrilling soprano a strange hermaphroditic harmony, neither of man nor of woman; they were thin and undersized, with narrow shoulders under their black robes, and with strange, pallid faces, in which the solemn eyes were too big for the rest, and the mouths were set in grave and mystic lines, like the little martyr of Moscow painted by Vasnetsóff.

The altar boys swung out their golden censers to the crowded

¹ Altar screen.

church; the Byzantine splendor of the Greek orthodox service went, like a processional of symbolic pageantry, through all its slow, magnificent way. Bishop and archimandrite, deacon and precentor, clad in glittering gold and silver robes, and chanting in sonorous old Slavic, bowed, genuflected, and finally withdrew behind the Holy of Holies, where they accomplished their secret rites. And so, little by little, the great mass came to an end, and the people, with relief, poured out of the hot and stifling Cathedral into the sunlit air.

A multitude of these worshipers had assembled near the foot of the Cathedral stairs, a little to the right, before a low, dark portal, which seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth, so damp and cold was the air that came therefrom. Each of them held in his hand a lighted taper. Hither came Earle from the Cathedral service, which he had piously attended; and here, of course, he encountered Evgénia Yermoláevna and all her brood.

"I should like to know," he demanded laughingly, in response to the cries and chaffing, "if there is any place in Sviatíya Góry where one cannot meet?"

"None," replied Evgénia, promptly, fixing on him her shrewd and humorous green gaze. "Fate has linked you and me together. You cannot escape me."

"Happy, thrice happy he!" sighed Daniloff with ponderous sentimentality. This elicited a gale of laughter from all but Evgénia.

"Yes! If *you* were linked, too, to some clever, practical woman of the world, like myself, for instance, who knows how to cook good food, and who has sense enough to keep you from stuffing and guzzling yourself into an early grave, it would be the better for you!"

And now it was Evgénia's turn to laugh. The red piteousness of old Daniloff's face, whenever his weakness was referred to, would have made a Chinese bonze twist up a brazen lip and smile in the very face of grave Confucius. But though the big man was sometimes hurt, he was never angry at Evgénia's quips, for he knew his weakness. Between Evgénia and himself, curiously enough, a kind of rough-and-ready friendship had arisen, very rough-and-ready on Evgénia's part, but good-humored withal; and as for Piótr, he was learning now "to give the change."

"Ah, Evgénia, Evgénia!" he sighed, as the rest chuckled over this species of gigantomachia between the champions of Energy

and Sloth, "if only you would consent to take care of me forever!"

"Be cautious!" warned Evgénia grimly. "If this is a proposal, I have witnesses to testify to it!"

The laughter was checked only by the sound of music on the warm and sunlit air. The Procession of the Cross had left the Cathedral, and was on its way.

2

Down the crowded steps of the Cathedral came the glittering cortège.

At its head, mitred, all gleaming in his episcopal robes, marched the Archbishop of Khárkoff, who had journeyed to Sviatiya Góry for this special purpose. In his thin, white hands he carried erect before him an enormous altar-candle, a full three feet in height, which burned feebly and flickeringly in the breezy air.

Behind him, in gown and cowl of somber black, his long white tresses waving in the breeze, came the Archimandrite, three heavy golden crosses on his breast.

In an open space a half-dozen brawny peasants, sweating and trampling, staggered under the weight of a holy image which must have weighed at least two hundred pounds.

Behind the peasants defiled the Monks of Sviatiya Góry—a sable procession by twos—a full six hundred, all with long beards and hair falling on their shoulders. The lesser clergy followed, carrying yellow, blue and scarlet banners of silk worked with holy symbols, which rose stiffly erect from their long staffs. As they came, they sang the holy songs perpetuated by their order; and the rich, sonorous, old-Slavic words rang out in their deep and harmonic voices like the brazen chime of bells. Straight to the *Peshchéri* (tunnels), before which the crowd waited, they marched in the train of the Archbishop.

The crowd reverently stood aside to let them pass. As each monk went in he received a taper, which he lighted at the solitary candle burning in a high socket near the inner door.

After the last one entered, the crowd surged after them, in a helter-skelter which soon resolved itself into single file when the narrowness of the up-climbing passage became apparent.

The Yermoláeff party had joined the general pell-mell. Earle found himself in almost pitch darkness in the narrow path hollowed out of the solid stone. In the flickering light of the taper

which he threw forward, he saw that before him walked Eléna Borísovna. She turned and looked at him, her face strangely lighted up or cast into shadow by the candles' fluttering flame.

"So pilgrims meet," she said with an attempt at lightness, yet with a tone the significance of which was not lost on Earle's perceptive ears.

"I have had no chance to talk with you——"

"Yes. In the car——"

She turned abruptly, holding up her skirts in front to prevent herself, because of the mounting path, from stepping on them.

She seemed to have no further desire to talk, so Earle turned with his taper to see who followed him. The intensely black gaze of Anna Isáevna, scintillating in the candle-flare, met and responded to his own; the rest of her face was thrown into shadow.

"Hello!" he cried, well pleased. "I am glad it is you who are behind me."

"Why?" she asked simply, shading her taper with her small ringed hand.

"Why? Am I not your guide and mentor?" he cried laughingly, referring to their conversation in the Park.

She made no answer, so he turned to give his attention to the now serious work of the ascent.

The path was growing narrower and narrower, steeper and steeper, the ceiling lower; a ghostly breath, ice cold, seemed to blow upon them, though there was no opening in the solid walls. Earle felt already a restriction of his chest; it seemed to him that the air was dead and lifeless; he experienced a sensation of choking.

Far ahead, now faint, now strong, depending on the turning of the way, the harmonic chanting of the Priests was heard.

After a few minutes the procession turned off sharply to the right.

For what seemed an interminable period they climbed up and up, over a constantly steeper path; the air was so rarefied that the tapers continually went out and had to be relighted.

3

After a few minutes of their ascent, they emerged into a wide, square chamber hollowed out of the solid rock. Here in the darkness, which the yellow flames of the candles dotted like so many golden stars, was an altar and shrine, before which

the Bishop and his coadjutors chanted a short litany, while, almost stifling, the crowd waited to continue. Then again away. But now there was some confusion. A number of stragglers in the rear of the long procession had completely lost sight of the direction followed by the Archbishop: two passages opened darkly at the right of the mountain chapel; there was uncertainty as to which path to choose.

"It's the further path," declared Anna Isáevna. "You can hear the chanting of the Priests!"

"Not at all! It's the first path!" boomed Daníloff. "Evgénia Yermoláevna went that way; and she is never wrong."

The little group that still remained behind, stood irresolute.

"Come, people, we've got to get out of this!" decided the School Inspector firmly. "Better a wrong path than none. I'm going to follow Evgénia. Who is with me?"

Most of the crowd went with him; and Daníloff led the way. But Anna Isáevna and a few others, including the American, obstinately maintained that the further path was the right one. So this second band of adventurers started out on their own explorations. The path that they had chosen led upward at a sharp angle, and they began to pant as they climbed. After about five minutes the passage ran off at a tangent; then at another; at last they came to its ultimate destination—a blank wall, with no issue.

"Well, we were certainly mistaken!" declared Earle, crest-fallen, as he threw his candle light on the solid wall. "The only thing we can do now is to turn back."

He threw the light behind him.

"Why, where are the others?" he exclaimed.

Anna Isáevna and he were utterly alone.

"The others must have turned back soon after we started," said Anna.

"They were probably warned by the steepness of the road. Well, there's no help for it. Let's get back as soon as possible."

So off they went on their return journey. They traversed the first tangent successfully; then the second. But a short way beyond they came to two passages running away from one another at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

"That is strange," remarked Anna Isáevna. "I hadn't noticed there were two passages when we came through here. Do you remember which one we came through?"

"No, I hadn't noticed the other, either. It's a case for luck, it seems to me. Heads left, tails right."

"Let's keep to the right. We'll come out somewhere, anyway."

So they bore off to the right.

Which brought them to a passage whose ceiling was so low that they had to stoop their heads; and where all atmosphere seemed suddenly to cease.

"This can't be right," said Earle. "There's no air here at all—see how low the tapers are burning. Let's turn back."

They did so, and as they turned, their tapers went out simultaneously.

"*Chort!*" (The devil!) Earle swore mildly. "Wait till I find my matches."

They stood there side by side in the close and airless darkness, so close and airless that a roaring and singing began in their ears, while Earle looked for his matches.

"It's strange," his voice came out of the blackness. "I thought I had a box of matches when I came here. I must have left them in my room."

"Oh!" exclaimed Anna Isáevna, in a frightened voice. "How shall we ever get back?"

"Don't be afraid!" he exhorted, though the sensation of being lost in the darkness of these burrowing and labyrinthine catacombs was far from agreeable, even to himself. "We'll find the way, with patience. Take my hand and we'll grope our way back by the walls."

She gave him her hand, and slowly and gropingly in the impenetrable darkness they retraced their steps. It seemed a century before they came out where they had entered.

The darkness was as complete here as in the other passages, but the ceiling was higher and the air, consequently, better. But here again they found two passages and did not know which to take.

"I never saw such a place!" Earle muttered. "New passages spring up in our path like mushrooms. Let's take the left this time."

After going what seemed a long way, they heard a roaring sound, and some rapidly-moving body, like a cannon-ball, went booming over their heads, fanning the air in passing.

Anna Isáevna screamed, and came to a dead stop, seizing Earle's arm with both hands.

"O Stepán Geór-r-r-gievich! O Stepán Geór-r-r-gievich! A horrid thing with wings brushed my face!"

"It was only a bat."

Despite this assurance Anne Isáevna began hysterically to cry.

Wherefore it seemed right to comfort her.

Which he did by putting his arm around her slender waist, and smoothing her thick, soft hair with his other hand.

"Don't be frightened, little girl. I think this is the right way. A little patience and we'll be out of it."

"I am not afraid any more," came the soft voice out of the darkness.

"And why are you frightened no more?"

"Because I am with *you*."

He smiled in the darkness at the *naïveté* of her response.

He could feel her breath coming quick and warm upon his cheek, and meshes of her thick, soft hair brushed against his face. So they progressed, till suddenly, almost a whisper, they heard again the far-off chanting of the priests.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with satisfaction. "I thought this was the right path."

Anna Isáevna was silent. It seemed to him that she leaned closer. The path was becoming steeper and steeper. A faint shimmer of light appeared far above them at the end of the slanting way. But around them it was still pitch-dark.

And suddenly he felt two slender arms around his neck, and a hot, soft cheek was pressed against his own, and full and sensuous lips pressed a rain of kisses over all his face.

"*Mily! Simpatichni!*"¹ came the passionate whisper in his ear. And now he sought her mouth, for this was a windfall sent by the gods which he, being man, might not despise; and found it and took it. . . .

Three minutes later, they emerged, dazzled, through a low door, out upon a wide and spacious esplanade, brilliantly flooded with sunlight.

4

"Ah!" cried Earle.

Before them lay the sparkling river, winding and writhing like a silver snake among green shores. Just below them rose green turrets above long, low-lying buildings; here soared the Pokróf-sky Sobór (Cathedral), with cupolas of blue surmounted by a golden cross, all aglitter in the sunlight, and with blue turrets, distributed at various peaks and angles, each with its flashing cross above.

On the west, at the bend of the river, stood the white and

¹ Dear one—sweet one!

green *château* of the great Potémkin, built across dark, olive-green hills, cut by gleaming cliffs.

Earle turned and looked to the East.

The river on this side was fairly straight; it was walled in by a high, sloping hill, grown thickly with trees, the foliage of which rippled like an emerald sea. From where they stood they could look down upon the Sviatõe Miésto, or Holy Place, a small island, gently sloping upward from the river; and on a narrow hill-path, hemmed in by black, rolling lands and by a thin band of woods, and topped by a pigmy chapel.

Across the river stretched before their eyes a far sweep of horizon, which, just above the green tops of the wood, was stained dark purple; on the east and west a misty blue. Below, unfolded a broad prairie land dotted by the little roofs of the hamlet, spots of greens, reds, browns, and yellows all fusing into a composite, picturesquely varied patchwork, which took the form of a vast semicircle. On the wide plain yonder was a whole encampment—the yearly *Yarmakd* (Fair)—multifarious in hue, with the variegated canvas of the tents, and the gaudy Little Russian costumes of the peasants and their women, much red and white and vivid blue. The tethered horses—hundreds of them—whites and reds and blacks, seemed hardly bigger than dogs from where they gazed. Just behind the stamping-ground came the silver flash of the innumerable pools and lakes, with which the Sviatiya Góry region is so thickly dotted. And when their gaze, fatigued with all this brilliancy, fell on the river, it followed with pleasure the broad and silvery course, to where the bridge ran connecting the two shores, now black with ant-like swarms of people, all coming and no one going. And little cockle-shells of boats were out by the hundred; just alongside of the bridge, bobbed up and down the bright green bark awaiting the Archbishop and his coadjutors, the boat which was to bear the sacred images and ikons to the “Holy Place.”

“It is beautiful!” Earle muttered.

He turned to find the burning, intensely black eyes of Anna Isáevna fixed upon his face.

“Why, you are not even looking!” he exclaimed with surprise, a little embarrassed as he remembered the kisses in the *Pesh-chéri*.

“No,” she answered, not taking her gaze away from him.

“Don’t you love all this?”

He made a broad and sweeping gesture over the edge of the enclosure, toward all the gleam and glitter of sky, arched over

Monastery and hill, and the bright, diversified colors of the peasant-folk below.

"Yes, it is beautiful," she said indifferently; so indifferently that he had to smile.

"Don't admire it because *I* do," he said whimsically. "I may be wrong about it, you know."

"*Am I not your slave?*" asked Anna Isáevna, in a trembling voice. "*If you said that Hell was Heaven, I would see it with your eyes!*"

And suddenly she turned, and ran away from him into the little underground church, where the Archbishop was already celebrating his second mass that day.

Earle did not follow her in; he had had enough of masses that day. He stood, leaning over the high edge of the parapet, surveying dreamily the wonderful panorama that lay before and below him like a vast and mighty canvas, painted by a Titanic hand. And as he gazed, he discovered that in his brain, repeated over and over, resounded the words of Anna Isáevna.

"*If you said that Hell was Heaven, I would see it with your eyes!*"

That, despite all his defiance, was what he felt for Liúba. . . .

5

The chanting began anew within the little church. The Archbishop, a medieval and solemn figure, holding his cross erect, came forth at the head of his train and retinue; by his side walked the Archimandrite, in his sable robes; and behind followed the sweating, red-faced peasants, scarcely rested from their arduous ascent, bending under the bronzen image which the yellow sunshine turned to gleaming gold; then all the monks and acolytes; after them the ever-attendant crowd.

"*Gallò!*"¹ What became of *you!*" called a voice from behind Earle as the cortège filed past.

He turned and found himself face to face with the School Inspector, who surveyed him kindly with his blue, near-sighted eyes.

"I?" Earle rejoined with an answering smile. "I got lost in the catacombs!"

The two fell into step together at the rear of the procession.

"Are we going down now?"

"Yes, but by the stairs."

¹ Hello!

"*Sláva Bógu* (Glory to God) for *that!*" exclaimed Earle piously.

"You don't seem to like our *Peshchéri*?"

"Oh, I won't say that," he answered, as he thought of Anna Isáevna, "only it's so dark and badly ventilated. Who made it, anyway? The early inhabitants of the Monastery, I presume?"

"Christian monks of the ninth century seeking for protection against the pagan Tartars, the scourge that swept up so often from the Caucasus and the Crimea."

"Very interesting! And in these dark tunnels chiseled out of the solid rock, these early Christians actually lived?"

"Lived, ate, slept and prayed for a whole lifetime. Many were hermits who never left their little chambers of rock."

They had, while talking, followed the procession around the winding platform of wood that ran for several hundred rods; and were now descending the broad and covered stair that led from the top of the mountain to its foot.

"How terrible—yet fascinating!"

The Inspector turned on him his mild gaze.

"You have yourself a monkish trend, my friend, if I am not mistaken."

"Perhaps you are right. But I do not see how *you* discovered it."

"We are all self-betrayers. Will you deny that you are a dreamer?"

"No," admitted Earle, with a little sigh. "I will not deny it. It would have gone better with me had I not been."

"Have no repentance!" exhorted the Inspector gently. "Dream, my friend, your mystic dreams. I, too, used to dream dreams and see visions of my own."

"And did they make you happy?"

"No. Or yes. Depending on how you look at it. I wish I could dream them again. But I have grown old, you see, and lost my illusions. Moral, *Stepán Geórgévich*, never grow old!"

The American returned the Inspector's mild, sad smile.

"Have you noticed all those holy pictures along the walls?" asked the Inspector. "Some of them, I believe, are very ancient. Old cuts and colorings from early times—the tortures of the Holy Martyrs, Visions of the Apocalypse, and so forth."

"Your Greek Catholicism—it is very beautiful," remarked Earle.

"It is formally incomparable," replied the Inspector absently. "Symbolically one of the richest religions in the world."

The Inspector broke off as the procession emerged from the covered stair and directed its way, now in silence, to the boat-landing at the base of the Pokrófisky Cathedral. There a great number of boats were moored—the ikon-boat first in the alignment.

The Archbishop, holding his big altar candle high, stopped a moment at the top of the granite esplanade, and behind him the long cortège became immobilized; there was a solemn silence as the Bishop bowed his bearded face over his glittering robes and mutely prayed.

Then he lifted up his head and began anew his sonorous chant.

The procession started again; followed the august leader to the boat landing. There the Archbishop stepped, grave and stately, into the high green boat; the somberly clad Archimandrite followed; then came the exhausted peasants with the ponderous image, which they let fall on the planking of the boat with an audible crash. The others followed; soon all the boats were filled.

At a signal they pushed off together—an imposing spectacle; the banners and holy image in each boat sent forth bright gleams of blue or scarlet or gold, contrasting with the sable robes of the monks. In the first boat the Archbishop's and Archimandrite's robes gleamed resplendent, while the Holy Image, as the sunlight struck it, rayed like a fallen sun. And towering majestic, Titanic, as if to mock all these human gauds and tinsels, rose high above their heads the vast and arching sky, the green, eternal hills.

Multitudes of other boats were already afloat, following in the wake of the religious pageant; scores of others were quickly chartered by the throng that crowded the great bridge; boatmen and watermen did for the next few minutes a rushing business—two rubles to go and come. A whole Russian fortune.

"Do you intend to follow the procession?" asked the Inspector as they paused on the landing after the boats had gone.

"No, I don't think so," Earle replied. "I have had enough of processions for to-day, I think. Is the Holy Place very interesting?"

"Yes. It is very picturesquely situated. But Evgénia Yermoláevna—God preserve her energy!—is already planning an excursion there late this afternoon. We're going to spend the moonlight on the water, you know."

"Are all the rest going?"

"Yes, quite a number, I believe. Piótr Samóilovich and his

daughters, and Liúba Yermoláeva and Prince Tatárinoff, and a few others."

"I think I'll leave you now and go to my Inn," Earle announced. "I have some things on hand that require my attention."

"You will be with us this afternoon?" asked the Inspector, pressing his hand cordially.

"Oh, yes, I think so. Sviatíya Góry and the Dónets by moonlight must be a beautiful spectacle."

"One of the wonders! *Do svidánia* (Au revoir), Stepán Geórgevich!"

"*Do svidánia*, Aleksiéi Andréich!"

6

In the Monastery Inn Earle walked the floor of his little room in a veritable fever of anticipation.

"Liúba is coming! Liúba is coming! Liúba is coming!" sang exultantly his throbbing heart.

"She is coming here to me. She will be with me alone. Seated opposite to me at table."

"Liúba. Liúba. Liúba. Liúba." Echomania; Echolalia; anything which the ponderous and bespectacled choose to call it—most people prefer to call it Love.

Earle had ordered the dinner through the young monk who served as waiter, and who, despite the shortness of their acquaintance, had become devoted to the American. Earle had given him much money, to buy succulent viands, and luscious fruits, and of the best that Sviatíya Góry could afford; and more money to bribe the Brothers of the Monastery kitchen to cook it, and cook it well; and more money to secure the prettiest balcony, overlooking the river, and to ensure the quickest and most efficient service. And at five minutes before one, precisely, Brother Athanasius escorted Earle hither. The latter uttered a cry of pleasure as he saw the large and spacious balcony, overlooking the river at a height of about fifty feet, and all secluded at its outer edge by vines and potted plants. In the middle of the balcony stood the small and cozy table, covered with a snowy cloth; and there were glassware and silver knives and forks from (so Athanasius said) the Archimandrite's own store, as was the wine that burned crimsonly in the glass carafe. And in a long-throated crystal vase before Liúba's place, most delicately blushed the roses that Athanasius had plucked in the Monastery garden.

At one o'clock Earle sat smoking innumerable cigarettes.

At five minutes past one he was pacing the balcony impatiently.

At ten minutes past one the fear first assailed him that she was not coming.

At twenty minutes past one he was sure of it, and sat down at the table disconsolate. She had merely been amusing herself at his expense. The beauty of the roses hurt him. He reached out his hand to pluck them and throw them away or trample them under foot.

And then she came.

Dressed in an exquisite Paris creation, all fallals and lace; long, graceful garments that trailed and whispered and died away like music, with big-brimmed, sweeping-plumed hat to match, a long necklace and elbow-length suede gloves, encircled by bracelets emitting golden gleams. And her small feet were shod with French *souliers*, adorned with silver bead-bucklings, and showing an adorable arch.

Never to Earle's eyes, as he leaped to meet and greet her, had Liúba Yermoláeva's beauty been like this. Beauty of gleaming hair of gold, and violet eyes, that suddenly flamed white like Makedónsky's; nose *retroussé*, and lips like rose-leaves, despite the passionate fullness of their molding. . . .

When he ran to her, she stopped short, and held out both her hands, in a spontaneous gesture, and he took them and pressed them hard, his eyes in hers. And now she laughed, showing, amid a white and ivory flash, the sharp little canine teeth which made of her laugh a never-ending thing of wonder and delight, and cast at him a mischievous smile.

"How nice it is here!" she exclaimed, taking off her hat and gloves, as she sat at the table. "You are better off than we. Ribopierre has no balconies, *s'il vous plaît*, in which he shows a lamentable lack of taste."

"I thought you weren't coming," Earle's tone was reproachful. "I was plunged in the depths of some divine despair when you fell from Heaven like a Goddess to console me."

"What pretty phrases you have," she exclaimed. "Where do you take them from? 'In the depths of some divine despair.' How poetic!"

"Not original!" confessed Earle, smiling.

"They sat down to table and Earle rang the bell; which was answered with surprising quickness by Fra Anastasio.

"Dinner, *bárin?* Immediately!"

He was quite long in returning, and meanwhile Earle leaned over and silently presented to her the vase of flowers.

"How lovely of you!" Her eyes lighted up with pleasure as she buried her face in the fragrant blossoms. "May I have one—now?"

She pinned a scarlet rose upon her breast; and laughed, and Earle rose and went to her and leaned far over to inhale its fragrance, just in time for Anastasius to see as he came in, bringing on a silver platter a steaming tureen of soup.

7

And so the dinner of these two together began and continued, an exquisite harmony, soft and fleeting as a dream; and what they said together is not important; for everything was in what lay behind. And as for the dinner itself, it consisted of savoury Polish *shchi*, which means thin cabbage soup, and then fresh caviar; and big red radishes from the Monastery garden; and crusty bread, which crunched and crackled underneath the teeth; and *pirogí*, hot, flaky cakes stuffed full of meat, chopped fine and seasoned; and a tender fillet, with curling shreds of green, and then fat little *útki* (duckling), roasted on both sides to a turn, and dripping with golden juices, and artichokes and truffles and mushrooms fit for a god. All this washed down with dry Crimean wine, the bouquet of which was a delight to be yearned for. And then there was watermelon followed by *priánniki*¹ with hot, strong, black coffee; and lastly *liqueurs* which burned the throat as they went down like slow, hot velvet.

After dinner Fra Anastasio deftly cleared the table away, and closed the door. Then Earle brought out his cigarettes, and at Liúba's request, lighted one for her as well as for himself; and so they sat, gazing dreamily out over the low stone balcony into a vast and fleecy sky, so white and fleecy, as Liúba prosaically remarked, that it looked as though it had just been washed. There they sat, while before them marched slowly by the mighty pageant of heaven; and below them rolled the green brown waters of the Dónets, with gurglings and melodies all its own.

"How pretty your boy is," said Liúba, languidly inhaling her smoke.

"You mean Anastasius? He is a jewel."

"He must be, if he conceived that dinner. How did he ever do it in this wild place?"

¹ Little cakes.

"He rather likes me, I think. He told me he serves in the Inn from choice, because here he can see something of the outside world and study life."

"Poor fellow! He is such a pretty boy! He deserves more of life than that! I suppose I must not flirt with him, or you will be angry."

"Do you flirt?"

"Terribly! Didn't you know it? It is my besetting sin." She laughed again. "You look as grave as my last confessor—before he began to court me."

"Perhaps because I am jealous of those you flirt with."

"That sounds better! Light me another cigarette, and bring your chair over near mine, you nice, queer, foreign boy!"

Stephen obediently moved his chair beside hers, and she turned languidly, and gazed at him, through a lifting cloud of pungent smoke, which cast a veil-like shadow over the warm loveliness of her piquant face.

"Aren't you afraid?" she asked lazily, leaning comfortably back.

"Afraid—of what?"

"Of whom, you mean?"

"Of whom, then, if you insist?"

"Of me, certainly."

"I am—a little," confessed Earle ingenuously. "Oh, at least, I'm beginning to be. You're almost too beautiful! And far too charming!"

Liúba smiled, a slow and lingering smile, at all this eulogy; and slowly, she raised her hand, and held it out to him. He took it quickly, and put it to his lips, and kissed it, back and palm, and jeweled fingers, over and over again.

"You shouldn't kiss my hand," she warned, with her touch of mockery.

"Why not?" He covered the hand in question with a little storm of kisses.

"Because it is the hand that yet will tame you."

"Bah!" rejoined Earle, recklessly. "Tame away! I am even beginning to think I would enjoy the process."

"Ah!" exclaimed Liúba, triumphantly. "So you capitulate in advance."

"I might!"

She leaned over toward him, till her beautiful face was very near his own. Earle looked at it, with a long, intent gaze, which stopped at the sensuous lips and dwelt there.

She raised her delicate brows.

"Why do you stare so at my mouth, American?" she challenged, feigning haughtiness.

"I stare at it because I covet it!" said Earle of a sudden, his smoldering eyes aflame.

He seized the beautiful face in both hands, gazed down for a moment with a queer smile at her mouth, and then, with a swift intake of his breath, covered it with his own.

She bent back her head; the heavy eyes closed. . . .

Breathing heavily, he drew away.

"My kisses are whips, English bear!" mocked Liúba, "whips to lash you into submission!"

"I need no whips! I am already tamed"

"Will you fetch and carry?" she demanded, continuing the jest.

"Yes!"

"Will you dance to my piping?"

"Yes!"

"Will you lick my hand with humility and resignation when I bestow my caresses on other bears?"

"No!" cried Earle unexpectedly. "That—never!" And he gazed at her blackly, but she only laughed, her hard and silvery laughter.

"Ah! my English bear, you revolt! I shall have to whip you again!"

And slowly she rose and came to him, sank upon his knee, wound soft and rounded arms around his neck, smiling like a witch, and stared down provocatively into his face.

"You are in love with me!" she said accusingly. "I know the symptoms. I madden you—I enrapture you—I torment you—I make you happy!"

"Yes!" he flung out desperately, as her lips hovered, sweetly fragrant, over his.

It was she who kissed him now—kiss after kiss. It seemed to his enraptured and exasperated senses that she would never stop.

CHAPTER VIII

I

FOUR o'clock in the afternoon; and the river gleaming like a great, smooth mirror, beneath the hot, down-pouring sun.

At the end of the long bridge the Yermoláeff party assembled *en masse*; and Evgénia was just as prominent and just as vociferous and indefatigable as ever; with the Prokurór a close second, and Daníloff (after dinner), very red and very puffy, and wiping the perspiration from his brow, far in the rear.

At the boat-landing, which was only a hundred yards from the bridge, Evgénia struck a shrewd bargain with the red-shirted Director. "A ruble and a half for the *afternoon*, not by the hour!" she thundered. "Not a kopek more, you accursed deceiver of innocence! Do you think I was born yesterday, devils take it? I hired boats, young man, before your Mamma gave you birth, so don't you try to overcharge me, you ear of swine, and speak quick if you want to rent out all your boats for the afternoon, or we will go elsewhere. Do you hear?"

The upshot of these energetic remarks, coupled with some further chaffing over the samovárs, was that soon all the *dáchniki* were afloat in no fewer than ten boats, crowded to the gunwales, a big, copper samovár crackling and bubbling in the stern of each; and a brawny, red-bloused boatman bending to the oars.

Straight up the river the flotilla moved; and there was much talking and laughing; and many jests were exchanged from boat to boat.

2

Earle, who sat in the boat in which Evgénia vociferously reigned, was frowning and preoccupied.

What could he do, and what was more natural than that Liúba should take him aside, and explain to him most sweetly that the Prince was an old friend of her Mother's, and of their family, and that he, as a full-blooded aristocrat, did not like to mingle with the helter-skeltery and pellmelly crowd; and that

he had invited Liúba to go with him, and Mama had asked her to be nice to him, so *please*, dear, don't be vexed this once; and another time I will row with you alone for miles and miles, and in the moonlight, too; and stop that horrid frowning; and catch that kiss that my very kissable lips are formulating at this very instant—*vídesk?*¹—and don't be cross; and be nice; and remember that I am madly, *madly* in love with you, and with you alone! . . . All honey on the wound.

So, with the good grace of the bear she had made him out to be, a bear whose fur has been singed, and which is driven, *nolens-volens*, into a relentless little cage, Earle had entered the boat of Evgénia Yermoláevna.

And there he had been compelled to listen to the energetic diatribes of Evgénia, who was inveighing against the laziness and immorality of the monks of Holy Mountain; and to the frenzied attempts at rebuttal made by the furious Prokurór, who was a pious devotee of the Greek Orthodox Church.

"Holy lives, indeed!" snorted Evgénia. "Meditation of holy thoughts, *indeed!* Meditation of fiddlesticks!"² Meditation of fat capons, and how to rake in the kopeks from the stupid peasants; meditation of washerwomen——"

"A thlander!" howled the disconcerted Prokurór. "A thlander! Monattherieth are alwayth thlandered, in all countrieth!"

Earle, whose mood was such that he was ready to pick a quarrel with any one, for once supported the Prokurór, much to the latter's satisfaction, and Evgénia's undisguised anger. And Earle and Evgénia had a violent quarrel; violent, at least, so far as Evgénia was concerned, and Earle infuriated her further by his cold and cutting rejoinders. So the merriment of the party fell, and they went the rest of the way in constrained silence.

And to make Earle more unhappy, Liúba flirted with both the Prokurór and Matviéi de Basilídes, when the boat in which she sat with the immaculate, aristocratic Prince made the landing. Standing on the high gunwale, with her skirts gathered high about her, revealing her small feet, shod in high-heeled shoes, and her delicate, silk-shimmering ankles, pretending that she was afraid to jump down. Earle, who had been waiting at the landing solely to snatch a few words with her, suddenly decided not to wait, and with bowed head went up the hill to the Holy Place. And when Liúba ran after him, and came up, all pink and panting, and demanded to know why he had not waited

¹ Seest thou?

² What she actually said was "cholera but little!"

for her, he had been what Liúba called "impossible," and they also had a quarrel, and he went on alone.

In the chapel of the Holy Place—a single high tower, dimly lighted from the top, Earle remained alone in the still gloom, stabbed through by golden gleams from the richly ornamented altar. Time passed. He heard voices rise and die away. The gloom grew deeper. When he came out, dusk was already falling.

3

He reached the landing, only to find that all the boats were gone, and that he was marooned upon this island to wait the angry Evgénia's good pleasure in returning. He sat down by the landing and lighted a cigarette.

Far off he could see them, dark shapes upon the water, and the echo of voices and gay trills of laughter floated faintly back to him on the cool evening breeze.

A sudden anger shot through him. They wished to punish him, to humiliate him. Very well, when they returned, they would not find him. He was at no one's mercy, much less that of Liúba Yermoláeva and her coarse, impossible mother. He rose suddenly, tightened his belt, threw aside his hat and stick, and let himself down quietly into the water. Strongly and powerfully, with long, even strokes, he struck off after the departing boats, his body cleaving the water like a swift swimming fish. He caught up with the last boat in the irregular procession, heard Liúba Yermoláeva's voice, and that of Prince Tatárinoff replying.

"But I insist, and you know me. . . ."

"Do not insist too much with me. . . . I am not the kind. . . ."

Furiously he shot onward, passing the boat of Evgénia, and smiling disdainfully as he heard her loudly abusing him.

Finally he came abreast of a boat loaded to the gunwale with a loud and noisy crowd . . . there was such a babble he could not distinguish voices. . . . Suddenly there came a frightened cry; a loud splash; a hubbub of alarmed, excited voices; the screams of women. . . .

"Overboard. She fell overboard. Boatman . . . there . . . there . . . there's her face . . . reach out an oar . . . the boat is leaving her behind . . . back water . . . back water. . . . O *Góspodí! Bózhè mói!*"

Earle already had the drowning woman in his grasp. It was Mária Aleksíevna.

"Don't be frightened!" he cried, as he swam hard with his other arm. "You can't drown; don't struggle."

"I am not frightened," replied Mária Aleksiéevna, with uncanny calm, just before the strong arms of the boatman pulled them in, amid a tumult of excited voices. Cloaks were thrown over them; cries of applause, and admiration for the American arose; the samovár was relighted, and they were made to drink hot tea to drive away the cold. Those in this boat did not even know that Earle had been left behind. Swiftly the boatmen rowed to the landing, where Mária Aleksiéevna and the Zém-sky Nachálnik, who had preserved a strange silence ("probably sorry she was not drowned," whispered Klara Petróvna in Earle's ear) disembarked.

Earle at first refused to go to the Monastery to change his clothes, but on their promise to wait for him, finally consented to do so. He returned dressed in old-time monkish garb, the long sable robe belted in at the waist with a tasseled cord, and the high peaked cowl pulled down to his very eyes. This transformation aroused much merriment. But when some of the curious ones tried to get him to tell them what it was that Mária Aleksiéevna—a bedraggled, uncanny figure, with her long, wet hair streaming about her small, abnormally pale face—had stopped on the landing-wharf to say to him, he refused to speak.

4

Ahead of them they saw the scattered segments of the fleet.

The moon, which for some time had hidden its resplendent face behind dark clouds, pierced through them tenuously, cleaving triumphantly its way of glory through a devil's sabbat of wild and cloudy shapes.

"Oh!" came the long-drawn sigh.

A wide *trainée* of silver, melancholy, inexpressibly suave, ineffably lovely, lay on the river at its central course.

The little crew was strangely silent as the boat, propelled by the strong arms of the boatman, cut its lapping and whispering way through the midst of that silver sea, all spangled with moon-gems, that gleamed and scintillated, intolerably bright, from a million facets. Above, like beds of snowy flowers, hung dense masses of stars, strewn in white, fluffy clusters across the deep blue void.

In that glorified path of rippling waters the other boats turned and came to meet them; and there were cries, and hailings, and

laughter and merriment, as the cowed and monkish figure, perched high at the stern of the boat, was recognized.

"Marry us, frater!"

"Take my confession, Father! I over-ate at dinner." (Piótr Samóilovich, of course!)

"Read us a mass!"

"A litany, Father Arkhángelos!"

"An *ave* for our immortal souls!"

"I pray ye, good people," quoth Earle, entering into the humor of the situation, with a snuffling voice, "have pity on a humble friar caught unawares. I cannot marry, for I am myself unmarried; I cannot take confession, for that is permitted by our Holy Orthodox Church but once a year; I cannot read ye a mass, for I have no book; nor sing a litany, for the same reason, and my memory is poor, and *aves* are Roman Catholic and heretical, so I am through!"

A chorus of approving laughter greeted this. From one of the boats that had drifted alongside, Earle saw Liúba Yermoláeva's face, pale in the silver radiance which turned her hair into a resplendent aureole.

As all the boats of the flotilla came together, and, carried by the current, bumped softly side by side, he felt her gleaming eyes upon him—saw her white hand, sparkling with jewels, fall across the gunwale—carelessly, as if by accident, yet easily within his grasp.

He reached out and took it.

"Liúba! *Póietè Póietè!*"¹

"The moonlight is so beautiful," answered Liúba lazily. "Why should I exert myself?"

A universal protest.

"Shame! Shame!"

"A girl who has sung in Paris!"

"The pupil of Cispnères!"

"Do pleasure!"

"Oh, well. . . . If you insist upon it. What shall it be?"

"Anything you like."

"I like everything, and I like nothing. I'll sing you the new song Rinchítsky dedicated to me. It's about beautiful eyes, and love, and you ought to like it."

There was a moment's silence, while her small, supple fingers intertwined with those of Earle, who was madly in love again. A pagan Goddess . . . Was she not the woman of his dreams?

¹ (Sing! Sing!)

She hummed the prelude, which like all the rest of the song was in a minor key, and then began to sing.

"Divnyia óchi, óchi kak móre——"

"Divinely gleaming, eyes like the ocean,
Deep as its caverns, and mystery-grave,
Always before me, waking emotion,
Glorified splendor of turquoise wave. . . .
With gaze that is shoreless, give me oblivion,
Drown my heart's anguish, still my soul's yearning. . . ."

The sweet, sensuously rich voice rose higher and higher, poured forth a flood of passionate bitterness. . . . Over the white hand which he now held imprisoned in both of his, and to which his lips were pressed, Earle bowed his cowed head, and did not raise it even when the sorrowful song of beautiful eyes and love came through its strange, minor way, to an abrupt and haunting end.

CHAPTER IX

I

HOME again, and the awakening next morning to the old, familiar life; to lie warm and comfortable, and drowse, and remember pleasantly the interesting sights and people we have seen during our absence.

Mária Aleksiéevna, at least, had special reason to congratulate herself over her warm bed, and the tangible fact of her own presence in it, instead of in the cold waters at the bottom of the river Dónets.

The first thing Mária Aleksiéevna did when she arose that morning was to send for her lawyer, who was summering this season at Slaviánsk; she also sent for old Dr. Malinóffsky and Dr. Mámatoff: the three very nearly arrived together. She received them in her own private rooms, and was closeted with them for a long time. When they came out, they looked all three perturbed; Dr. Malinóffsky took the other two into his office; and there also, a long and secret discussion reigned. Then Dr. Malinóffsky was closeted with the Psychopátka; some sort of a deadlock had been established.

Mária Aleksiéevna did not come out of her room for several days. The maid, crossing herself piously, reported that she was sitting propped up in bed, of a deathly paleness, with dark rings beneath her eyes, smoking incessantly, and looking very much like an uncanny seeress who knew much more than she would tell.

As for the rest of the *dúchniki*, their life flowed on exactly as before: in eating, bathing, listening to the music, talking, flirting, reading, or resting.

August (the Russian August)¹ was now wearing to its close. The days were sweltering hot, and the nights but little better. Visits went on as usual, but with an element of languor; post-prandial siestas became longer; hot tea was abjured by all but the Russophils.

¹ The old style Russian Calendar before the war was thirteen days behind that of Western Europe.

Vera de Marly gave a birthday party on the day of Saint Pantalimon—one of the early Christian martyrs. Most of the Yermoláeff cottagers attended the morning mass at the Pavilion altar, and went to Vera's party in the afternoon.

The Daniloff-de Marly villa was crowded to the doors. Madame de Basilides, whose gnarled and wrinkled hand, according to Vera, had been kissed by the great Rubenstein in person in the days of the old Greek gentlewoman's girlhood, when she had played at a concert in Paris, evoked such rich and unexpected harmonies from the de Marly piano that every one was amazed. Then Vera played what she called *raggtám* (rag-time), for the declared purpose of making the American feel at home. Piqued by his unflattering lack of praise, she challenged him to do as well. With a sudden smile Earle sat down before the piano and played piece after piece of rollicking, irresistible swing, until the delighted hearers were all beating time with foot or fan. . . . The applause, as he whirled about, his fair hair falling in confusion over his eyes, which gleamed like two blue fires, was deafening.

There was dancing, including a children's quadrille, which every one declared to be charming. Then came a wonderful dinner, the menu of which was too elaborate for description here. After which Anastásia Aleksándrovna ("that actress") rose and declaimed, in a way that took away everybody's breath, Makóffsky's famous lines on "Love." And lastly Nina Sergiévna, the Conservatory girl (with whom the Prokurór was still carrying on an ardent flirtation) and Liúba Yermoláeva closed the whole program with a selection of accompanied songs, to which the guests, still seated at the tables, listened from outside.

All voted Vera's birthday-party a great success. Only two incidents marred it, from Vera's point of view: one, the fact that Volódia Yermoláeff got disgracefully drunk; and the other that Anna Isáevna, the little Jewess, became hysterical during Liúba's last song, and had to be taken home. Eléna found her lying on the floor of her room afterward, sobbing bitterly, and took her up and comforted her as best she could. All too well Eléna knew what was the source of HER unhappiness. . . . Red flowers . . . too many Red Flowers. . . . Before her, on the homeward road to the Sanatorium, Eléna had been preceded by Liúba Yermoláeva and Stephen Earle, arm in arm, and apparently more in love than ever. She had seen them turn in toward Liúba's villa. For some reason, Eléna herself was restless and unhappy after Vera's party.

A number of people remarked after the party that Anna Isáevna looked sick. The heat, probably, poor thing! She was pale and nervous; her eyes were overbrilliant, and her manner *saccadé*. And as a smoker she outdid even Ekaterína Ivánovna.

"How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?" Earle asked of her, with astonishment and disapproval, as he saw her light cigarette after cigarette.

It was one morning, just before the bath. Earle had avoided the girl since the return from Sviatýia Góry; he had, at the bottom of his heart, an uncomfortable feeling over what had taken place between them. At Vera's birthday party he had scarcely given her a glance.

Anna Isáevna had been sitting on the broad steps of the Sanatorium when Earle came out from a late breakfast. Following his usual after-breakfast custom, he had lighted a cigarette, and, tilting his chair against the wall, had begun to read the editorials in his voluminous morning paper. After a time he put down his paper and gazed out into the flickering sun-patches on the tree-roofed path leading to the gate. It was then that he noticed how often the silver cigarette case of Anna Isáevna came into play.

Anna Isáevna turned and gazed at him—rather an odd glance—he thought.

"I don't know," she replied, indifferently. "I don't count, you know."

"But I thought—somebody told me—Eléna Borísovna, I think——"

"That I had given up smoking? I did, for a time. But my nerves were used to it. I felt so bad without it I had to take it up again."

"That's the way it is with all narcotics," commented Earle. "I dare say if I stopped smoking I should miss it, too, for a while. But I am strong and mature and well; and you are a young girl of a very nervous disposition, and——"

"Why do you reproach me?" The girl spoke with such fierceness that he stopped short and stared at her astonished. "Am I not a human being? What would you have me do?"

And with heaving bosom and flashing eyes, she rose from the steps, and ran quickly into the Sanatorium's open door.

And Earle, left alone, recalled the pamphlet of Tolstói that Liubóff Borísovna had recently loaned him—"Dlíd chevó liúdi

odurmánivaiutsia?” (Why do people stupefy themselves?) Wherein the venerable philosopher treats of all the multiple evils to which the habitual use of narcotics in any form inevitably lead. These results were bad enough, Earle knew, in the case of men; what must they be for women with their frail physical and nervous inheritance——?

He thought of Evgénia then, and an involuntary smile curved up his lips. There was no bodily or physical weakness there! In which belief subsequent events proved him to be quite mistaken.

3

Anna Isáevna was not the only one who suffered from the heat. Vera de Marly reported that she had become psychopathic. She came over to the Malinóffsky villa one sultry August afternoon to see Eléna. The latter, dressed in a light and frilly peignoir, her heavy hair unbound, was lying down in her room, with a volume of short stories, a *zbórník*,¹ as such collections are called in Russia.

When Vera was ushered in, Eléna, who was half sitting, half lying, propped up upon a pyramid of pillows and cushions skillfully intercalated at befitting angles, languidly raised her head.

“Who is it? Vera de Marly? Come in, Vera.” (Her nerves stiffened and sang “Courage now. Do not show her anything.”) “I am as glad to see you as the heat will let me be.”

“Which is as glad as any one could be at this time of year,” replied Vera, seating herself in the big leather armchair before the writing-desk, a few feet from the bed.

Vera was dressed, as usual, all in white; white shirtwaist, rather startling décolleté, daringly transparent as to bosom, back, shoulders and arms; a neatly-fitting skirt of white French piqué, high-heeled kid slippers, a fluffy sunshade, and no hat at all. Russian from head to foot, with her brown-green eyes, her slightly uptilted nose, broadening at the base, and her full red lips. She cast an appraising glance at Eléna, at her flushed and vital face illumined by the deep gray eyes; at her magnificent, dark hair, full of tawny gleams, which fell in flooding luxuriance over her shoulders, reaching far below the knees; at the graceful, opulent form, which the filmy folds of her *négligée* fully revealed. An envious glance.

“*Mon dieu*, Eléna—how pretty you are like that!” she exclaimed, with a kind of reluctant admiration. “You really

¹ Literally a collection—an Anthology.

should always go about in a peignoir with your hair down. You look like a young Goddess!"

"You flatter me!" returned Eléna calmly. "As to going about in this attire——" she made an eloquent gesture.

"I know you wouldn't," said Vera sweetly. "You're too proper for that; you wouldn't do anything so unconventional."

They chatted for a time on indifferent subjects—about Kuprin's sensational story, "Sea-sickness," which Eléna had just been reading, and "the beast in human form" which it described; about the vogue for indecent literature in Russia since the Revolution, and the decadence of the Russian *Intelligentsia*.

Finally Vera revealed to Eléna, who was making conversation against time, the real object of her visit, which, it appeared, was to talk scandal over the "shameless" love-affair between Liúba Yermoláeva and Stephen Earle, as well as to inflict a few feline stings regarding Makedónsky, disguised in the form of disinterested advice.

Vera, disappointed at Eléna's point-blank refusal to join with her in condemnation of the "shameless" love-affair aforesaid, actually had the insolence to warn Eléna against Makedónsky, who, she admitted, was "overpowering." But Eléna should not throw herself away. . . .

"This love—this so-called love, for which we yearn and intrigue—what is it, after all, and what do we get out of it?" asked Vera, with a great display of feeling. "Dust, ashes and repentance. And some of us deserve it, for we are weak and shallow creatures, after all. But you, dear, deserve better, for you . . . So—don't—and forgive me. . . ."

"One husband is worth more than a thousand lovers"—Eléna found herself suddenly all of a-tremble—"but true love, wherever placed, is a holier thing than forced physical union, or even a pledge, with weak, contemptible male creatures who bestow their loathsome caresses on all women indiscriminately, and on our best friend in particular!"

Vera grew white, laughed nervously, disconcerted.

"That is true!"

She straightened up and turned to the door.

"Well, dear, I must go."

She suddenly stopped and pressed a ringed hand to her brow.

"Ah!"

"Are you ill?" asked Eléna coldly.

"A dizziness! I have not been well of late. First symptoms of old age, I presume."

Her laughter rang hollowly.

"I think I am becoming psychopathic, like Mária Aleksíevna," she observed, taking her hand from her brow. "I don't sleep at night, and I am afraid of the dark—a kind of claustrophobia."

"The effects of a bad conscience, perhaps——"

"Perhaps it is," admitted Vera quite humbly (for her), as she opened the door.

4

After Vera's departure Eléna lay down again and tried to continue her reading, but found herself unable to concentrate. Vera's words, as usual, had been full of female scratches. About Grigóri, about Anatól, about Stephen Earle, about herself. . . . She could hardly remember an interview with Vera which had not left her with a feeling of deep resentment. . . . For once, at least, she had given Vera as good as she sent. As for Grigóri, she had avoided him so obviously since that night in the Park that he had spoken to her about it that very morning "at the music." Very calmly she had told him that their engagement was at an end. Eléna smiled slightly as she remembered Grigóri's amazement. Like all men of his type, she supposed, he was quite oblivious to the effect of his philanderings. He had walked with her across the Park, talking—for him—with unwonted earnestness. "Did she realize the seriousness of this step?" he had asked. "And would she kindly explain——"

Her sensitive nostrils dilated and her lips curled as she remembered his question.

"Yes," she had replied quietly. "She quite understood what she was doing—and why."

Pressed to explain, she had refused pointblank. Scornfully. She did not care to descend to the vulgarity of explanations. The essential was that she wished to break her engagement—irrevocably.

Grigóri at this had become quite angry and had threatened to speak to her parents. She had merely smiled—a smile which had made him furious.

"You will not drive me away from Slaviánsk, Mademoiselle Malinóffsky!" he had exclaimed as they reached the stile-gate.

"Your future actions are immaterial to me, Grigóri Maksímich," she had replied as she left him.

So her engagement to Grigóri was broken and she was again free. What use would she make of her freedom? She had no plans. Makedónsky? She did not even know if she loved him.

. . . He had some strange magnetism—yes, she admitted to herself quite frankly that he fascinated her. And yet . . .

She had just begun to think of Stephen Earle—and Liúba—when she heard the deep melancholy cadences of Chaikóffsky's *Chanson Triste*. Some one was playing on the Sanatorium piano. She recognized her brother's touch. Anatól was an accomplished performer. *Bózhè*, how that boy could play! With all her course at the Conservatory, she had never been able to equal him, despite the fact that Tóssia was practically untrained.

The piano seemed like a living soul, wild and sad, like the soul of the great composer, King of the Realm of Neurasthenia, spokesman of all the pathological emotions of a fin de siècle and decadent world.

The deep, sobbing notes were in harmony with her mood. She sat there on her bed, propped up on the pillows, her book held idly in her lap, listening wistfully. The wild sobbing ceased. The fathomless yearning died. . . .

Suddenly Eléna heard loud voices in the corridor—angry voices. Evgéna Yermoláevna in stentorian tones was berating some one; her unceremonious words were plainly audible.

"Well you know, Anatól Borisovich! Well you know that your father has forbidden the use of the piano from four to six when people are resting. That accursed Psychopátka sent Aniúta to me to complain. Have you no sense at all in your big, hulking body?"

Eléna heard Anatól's deep, guttural voice raised in reply:

"Shut your vile mouth, Evgéna Yermoláevna! Do you think because my Father abuses me, that I will take it from *you*? I am paying my board in this Sanatorium. Mind your own business, and I will mind mine!"

"*Proklídtia!*" came Evgéna's booming, furious voice. "*Durák!* Idiot! You good-for-nothing, impudent young sawbones! Do you think *I* care for your few rotten rubles? If you stay in my Sanatorium, you've got to observe the rules here; let me tell you that, my fine card-sharper!"

"Shut your mouth, I tell you, you howling female monkey——"

But Eléna, fearful of the results of this quarrel if her father should hear, was already in the corridor.

"Tóssia!" she remonstrated as she faced the two combatants—Evgéna, a deep crimson with blazing green eyes—Tóssia with a face like a thundercloud and with clenched fists. "How can you speak so to Evgéna Yermoláevna?"

"Mind *your* business too!" was his furious reply. "This female monkey here——"

"Female monkey, indeed!" screamed the outraged Evgénia. "If I put my fist on you, you good-for-nothing gambler, I'll stop your impudence in short order! Wait till I tell your Papa how you call me out of my name in my own Sanatorium! Take my word for it, you'll pack your trunks to-morrow and get out, or my name isn't Evgénia Yermoláevna, which it is, you hooligan and devil!"

And sweeping the crimson trail of her capote behind her majestically, she left, on vengeance bent, to pour her vociferous complaints into Dr. Malinóffsky's exasperated ears.

"Oh, Tóssia!" exclaimed Eléna, fixing on him the disapproving and most uncomfortable glance of Woman—with the inevitable result which she can never understand. As the Prokurór would express it, Tóssia's soul boiled over like a samovár. His quietness, however, deceived her.

"Come thou here!" he muttered, pushing open the door of an unoccupied room, before which they happened to be standing.

Thinking he meant to express his regret, and to talk with her about himself, she stepped in confidently. Tóssia closed the door. Suddenly he seized her arm in an iron grasp . . . his deep brown eyes blazing, his face convulsed like that of a madman. In another second she found herself gazing into the sinister muzzle of a loaded revolver, which he thrust into her very face.

"*Odnò slóvo i ya vas výstrieliu kak sabákul!*" (One word, and I'll shoot you like a dog!)

"Oh, Tóssia!" She shrank away from him, pale and terrified, her lips trembling.

"You know me not!" he shouted, beside himself, in a storm of uncontrollable passion. . . .

The door crashed open—Dr. Malinóffsky, tall and threatening, appeared on the threshold.

"What is all this? What is all this?" he thundered, in a voice even more formidable. With one sweep of his long arm he knocked the revolver from Anatól's hand. It fell with a metallic clash upon the parquetry floor—happily it did not explode.

"Leave this place at once!" he commanded, his dark eyes flashing fire. "Go! And do not return till you are prepared to make apologies both to Evgénia Yermoláevna and to your sister—otherwise, return not at all!"

Intimidated, in spite of himself, Anatól stooped and picked up his revolver.

"I will go!" he growled, in a deep and trembling voice. "And be sure that when I go I shall never return. I have enough of you

all. Blame and abuse is all I get! I have no family. Oh, be sure that I shall never put foot in your home or in your Sanatorium again!"

"A good riddance!" shouted his father back at him, as furious as himself. "Go! You are not fit to live in the society of civilized people! Go!"

Anatól rushed out, slamming the door frantically behind him.

Borís Vladimirovich sank heavily into a chair, his hand upon his heart. Eléna flew to him.

"Oh, Papa . . . oh, *Pápochka!* I am so sorry! It is my fault! I know it is my fault!"

"Not your fault!" he muttered. "The boy is in a bad way. I cannot control him. He is sick. He has become a danger to society!"

The strong man groaned. Filled with woman's poignant and impulsive compassion, she kissed his large and shapely hand where the single ring—his wedding ring—gleamed goldenly.

"*Pápochka*—you are suffering! Your heart is sick!"

"Sick—yes." His big, gaunt figure rose abruptly. Without another word, silent according to his usual custom, he left the room. Eléna burst suddenly into tears. . . .

5

About an hour later, bathed and dressed, Eléna went out upon the balcony of the Sanatorium. Mária Grigórevna, the Pope's wife, was sitting at one of the tables, engaged in conversation with the American.

"*Zdrástè!*" greeted Eléna. "Don't get up, Stepán Geórgevich. I was looking for Mama."

"I saw Ekaterína Ivánovna go into the room of the Prokurórsha only five minutes ago," said the Pope's wife, in her soft and drawling voice. . . . "Come over here and talk to this American, Eléna Borísovna," she added, with her slow, good-humored smile. "He is asking me such questions that I don't know what to do with him—"

"Questions?" repeated Eléna, smiling faintly as she approached the table. "What kind of questions?"

"About my soul. . . . He is a living interrogation point. 'What is your most intimate and secret nature, Mária Grigórevna?' if you please, was what he just asked me before you came, or words to that effect."

Eléna found herself able to laugh, not her usual frank, spon-

taneous laughter. "That, Mária Grigórevna, certainly was a very comprehensive question. And did you tell him?"

"That I certainly did *not*!" declared the Pope's wife with emphasis. "*Some* of us women have got to discourage him. Do you know what Vera de Marly has already baptized you, Monsieur Earle—The 'Explorer of Souls?'"

Earle smiled—somewhat grimly.

"I have not tried to explore *her* soul, at least!" he replied, in a tone that left no doubt of his antipathy for Vera.

"It's late. I've got to go in and dress," interrupted the Pope's wife, rising. "Be careful, Eléna Borísovna; he'll turn you inside out in a minute, if you let him."

"But I won't! I've got to go in myself, first of all . . . so there's no danger."

"Don't go in immediately!" begged Earle, as she, too, rose to go. "I hate to be alone just at this time."

"Why?"

"Twilight makes me sad," he answered simply, just as the maid came out to light the terrace lamps.

"We can be sad together," replied Eléna. Her lips began again to quiver.

He looked at her attentively in the failing light.

"You seem upset."

"I *am* upset. My brother only an hour ago thrust a loaded revolver in my face, and threatened to shoot me."

"Good heaven! Does he do such things often?"

"He threatened once to shoot Papa. He never did it with me before. He had been quarreling with Evgénia Yermoláevna, and when I remonstrated he took me into an empty room and threatened to shoot me. 'I will shoot you like a dog!' he cried. 'You do not know me!' His face was that of a madman. It frightened me terribly. . . . And then Papa came in, and knocked the revolver out of his hand, and ordered him to leave the Sanatorium. Papa told me afterwards that the boy was sick . . . that he had become a menace to society. Afterward I went up to his room and consoled him—he always suffers so after a quarrel with Papa—and found him heartbroken. The poor boy is so soulsick and unhappy—Poor Tóssia!" Tears came into her eyes and she brushed them away with her hand, pretending not to look at him.

"It is dangerous for a boy in his state of mind to carry about with him a loaded revolver," remarked Earle. "He is a very strange boy—very moody. . . . Late this afternoon I heard

wonderful music coming from the reception room. I went in—the room was almost dark. . . . He was playing Chaikóffsky's *Chanson Triste*. I never heard anything like it. He has the touch and the mastery of a genius. He left unceremoniously when I spoke to him."

Eléna looked up at him.

"Stephen," she said, in a low voice.

He looked up.

"How close is our friendship?"

"How close? Very close. What do you mean?"

"I am tempted to put it to one of the hardest of tests. You tested *me* once, you know."

"What test?"

"The test of criticism."

"Of criticism?"

"Yes. Something that will sound to you ungracious—like reproach."

He looked at her keenly.

"Even *reproach*! What crime have I committed?"

"No crime," she said quickly. "And what you have done was unconscious, I know. Yet— Tell me if you will be offended?"

"I react badly to criticism," he confessed frankly. "That is, with most people. But I believe I could stand it from you. Tell me, what is my transgression?"

"You are plucking too many red flowers," she said tentatively. Her glance met his bravely.

"Plucking too many—oh!"

"Do you understand?"

"In general, yes. . . ."

"I must betray a secret. . . . My brother loves Nadiézhda Petróvna. He had with her quite recently an understanding. . . . And this afternoon he saw you with her on the steppe—laughing and enjoying yourselves, and he saw you kiss her hand. . . . And he was heartbroken, and that's really the direct cause of the quarrel he had with Evgénia Yermoláevna and Papa——"

Earle looked astounded.

"But *Góspodi*! I didn't know—I didn't suspect——"

"Of course you didn't! I told Tóssia it was just a harmless flirtation—that there isn't anything serious between you and Nadiézhda——"

"There certainly isn't!" he confirmed emphatically. "We have had a mild little flirtation—innocent enough. I noticed she defended Anatól when some one criticized him, and also to me—but

I didn't know—I thought your brother was in love with that girl from Warsaw—the actress, Anastásia Aleksándrovna——”

“There's some secret about *her* which Tóssia wouldn't tell me,” replied Eléna. “He admitted that some danger threatened him through her, but he wouldn't tell me what. It's preying on his mind, I can see that. It worries me greatly. One thing sure, he doesn't love her, and he does love Nadiézhda, and the arrival of Anastásia has come between them and made trouble.”

“I'm awfully sorry if I have done anything.”

“It isn't your fault,” she said generously. “Nadiézhda is pretty and very coquettish. She's known for that. Nothing like Vera, however, and of course you had a perfect right. But—but . . .”

“I didn't kiss her,” he declared pointblank.

Eléna looked at him with a new softness in her manner, but made no comment.

“Will you forgive me for seeming to criticize?” she asked.

“Nothing to forgive,” Earle assured her heartily. “I'm glad you told me—I'll keep away from Nadiézhda in future—I promise you.”

“Thank you, Stephen,” rejoined Eléna quietly. “Now I know you're my true friend—I——”

At that moment a maid appeared with a message from Ekaterína Ivánovna. Would Eléna Borísovna come—before dinner—to see her mother in her room? About Tóssia, of course. The cloud came over her face again.

“*A tantôt!*” she said to Earle, with a grateful smile.

“*Au revoir*, Eléna.”

Eléna turned to go, and suddenly returned.

“Can you keep a secret?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“I have broken my engagement with Grigóri Maksímich.”

Earle's face suddenly beamed. Impulsively he stepped forward and held out to her his hand.

“I congratulate you!” he said, as he crushed her hand in his. “I have been hoping—and expecting—that you would do that, ever since I saw . . . By heaven, I'm glad for you! He isn't worthy to tie your shoe-string!”

Eléna laughed softly, and, as he released her hand, gathered up her skirts and ran lightly through the door, and disappeared.

CHAPTER X

I

EKATERÍNA'S tears prevented Tóssia's departure. Grimly he waited . . .

One morning, just at dawn, as Nadiézhda Petróvna, awakened by the twittering birds in the Park, saw the gray light glimmering in through the window-square upon the whitened wall of her bed-chamber, it seemed to her that she heard a low voice calling her name from beneath; a moment later a handful of gravel struck her window pane. Startled, she sat up in bed, listening. Another handful of pebbles struck the pane. She jumped out of bed, drew on a kimono, ran to the window, and gazed below.

"Who is it?" she called, frightened as she saw a man's form below.

"It is I!"

"Who—I?" she called back. Then she recognized the white, upturned face, which looked ghastly in the faint penumbral light.

"*Tóssia!*" she cried in amazement, hardly able to believe her own eyes. "Why do you come so early in the morning?"

"Nadiézhda! I must see you! I must see you at once!"

His deep voice was so broken and trembling she could hardly recognize it.

What could have happened? Some great catastrophe? Or was he out of his senses? Curiosity, solicitude, pleasure at his coming, struggled all together in her breast for mastery.

"Wait! I will come down and let you in!"

Noiselessly she opened her bedroom door, slipped down the stairs, her long, black braids swinging on her back, went to the front door and quietly unbolted it. A moment later Tóssia's great bulk was framed in the door; his desperate, haggard eyes stared into hers.

She put a warning hand over his lips.

"Come into the parlor and wait till I close the doors," she whispered, drawing him after her into the adjoining room.

She faced him, frightened.

"What is it, Tóssia?"

"Forgive me for coming so early!" he said in a broken voice. "I suffered all night. I can't stand it any more alone. Read this! Oh, Nadiézhda . . ."

He thrust a crumpled paper into her hand.

It was an official document, signed and sealed, the Russian Imperial Eagle at the top, issuing from the *Shtab* (Headquarters) of the Russian Army in Petersburg.

In curt, official language he was ordered to appear in two weeks' time before the *Voénny Sud*¹ at Warsaw to answer charges of conduct unworthy of a gentleman and an officer, in view of failure to disprove which, official recommendation would be made for his summary and dishonorable dismissal from the Army.

"Oh, Tóssia!" she whispered, anguished for him, as she looked up into his pale and twitching face.

And Tóssia, lifting his great bulk up, began to walk the floor, raving and sobbing both together. His career was ended; he was disgraced; his family was disgraced; all the hopes of his youth, the toils of his years of study, were now in vain.

"And it was *He* who had done this. *He* and no other."

"Who? Who else but Makedónsky?"

"*Makedónsky?*"

"Yes, Makedónsky! . . ." Nástinka had fled from him. And he had pursued her. She had told Tóssia so herself. . . . Makedónsky, who had threatened to "break" him because he had shown Nástinka sympathy, which she had misunderstood.

"Nástinka?"

"Yes. Anastásia Aleksándrovna. She was, or rather, had been, Makedónsky's mistress. Oh, but he should pay for it, and dearly!"

"His life or mine. His life or mine—by God!" he cried, with insane fury.

"Tóssia!" said Nadiézhda firmly, rising and going to him, and putting her hands upon his shoulders. "You are beside yourself. You must be calm. You did well to come to me. I am your friend. I will help and advise you. First of all, how do you know that Makedónsky did this?"

The somber flaming of his deep brown eyes laughed her to scorn.

"How do I *know*? Did he not swear to 'break' me? And soon? Why should *I* be singled out for dismissal? Do you think I am the only officer who has gambling debts, or relations with the wives or mistresses of other men? No, it is clear beyond doubt;

¹ War-Court, equivalent here to Court-Martial.

Makedónsky, and he alone, has had me dismissed from the army. But, oh, I swear——!"

"Sh!" Nadiézhda put her hand over his foaming mouth. "Be calm. You need all your coolness now. Tell me, Tóssia. We have been estranged. . . . I know it is my own fault, but I was too proud to seek you out first. I must know. I do not want to be indelicate. What, exactly, are your relations with Makedónsky's—with Anastásia Aleksándrovna?"

And Tóssia, in brief, growling sentences, told her the history of the affair from the beginning—how Makedónsky, Colonel of one of the *chic* regiments stationed at Warsaw, had returned from a visit to Siberia with a woman who passed for his wife. He, Tóssia, had heard much of Makedónsky, of his pagan beauty, his wild, dissipated life—drinking, gambling, women; of his fascination, his accomplishments; of his duels, which usually meant death to his opponents. He described how he had met him at the Military Club—a fleeting acquaintance.

Then he described his meeting with Makedónsky's mistress—yes, it was notorious—at a friend's house. Her face and manner had attracted him—her childishness, her pale and piquant face. They had liked each other. She told him how she met Makedónsky in Siberia—in Irkútsk.

"In Siberia?"

"Yes, in Siberia. His brother was in charge of one of the army posts there. He traveled all that way to visit him, in spite of the fact that the pneumonic plague was raging. One night he went to the theater. It was crowded, as usual, with pleasure-seekers at any cost; periods of pestilence are always like that. A young actress, under the name of Anastásia Aleksándrovna, was making her *début*.

"It was Gogol's 'Dead Souls.' She had tremendous success. The curtain was rung up seven times. Makedónsky made her acquaintance afterward, in a café; I can't tell you the circumstances. He fascinated her; carried her off to Petersburg."

"Why did he go to Warsaw?"

"Some scandal. A duel, I think. He found it convenient to move."

"I see. . . . And his—Anastásia? . . ."

"She was very unhappy. She liked me. Little by little we met, here and there: at the Military Club, at the theater, in the house of friends. She told me of her previous life. One day I ran across her. In the Liétny Sad (Public Garden). She was weeping. Makedónsky had threatened her life. She told me all

about it. He made her existence a hell on earth. I felt horribly sorry for her. When she told me she couldn't stand it any longer, and intended to run away and go back to Siberia,—I was sorry for her. She wept on my shoulder. Finally she went back to Makedónsky, told him she loved me ('Oh, what a *fool!*' interpolated Nadiézhda viciously), and asked for a separation. This time he was as cold as ice. He refused to let her go; threatened to shoot me—drive me out of the army. That was a month ago. I gambled more than ever to forget my troubles. All night. Rumbling home at dawn on an *izvóschik*. Twenty-six years old; seven thousand rubles debt; my career ruined. And here I am at Slaviánsk. I don't even know how to get back to Warsaw. And facing a court-martial. God!"

"But the worst is this—I'm bound to a woman for whom I feel pity, but no love."

"Are you *sure* you do not love her?" asked Nadiézhda gravely.

"Absolutely! She misunderstood; I couldn't undeceive her. . . ."

"And now?"

"Impossible! She told my mother that we were secretly engaged; and my mother is almost beside herself because she is—well, what she is. And between ourselves, we do not get along; we quarrel incessantly. I have been even more unhappy since she arrived."

"But—has there been—is there——?"

"No!" said Tóssia firmly. "Nothing, if that is what you mean. My fault; not hers!"

"Oh, Tóssia, I am so glad!" Nadiézhda suddenly pressed her cheek to his. "And I, too, have been unhappy all this time. I thought I should go crazy when that woman came. I wanted to go to you and tear you away from her, but pride kept me back."

"But now we must talk of you. . . . Do you think there is any chance of acquittal?"

"None, unless the influence against me is removed." He spoke so grimly that a little shudder ran through her.

"Not that, Tóssia! You must never, never think of that! . . . Perhaps we can devise some plan. . . . Some one of influence must intercede, must remonstrate with Makedónsky. You cannot accept this dismissal silently, without protestation. And Makedónsky must be approached by some strong advocate of your cause, some person who would have power over him."

"But who?"

"I do not know who. But I will find . . . When did you receive this paper?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"And all the night you have suffered—alone. Poor, dear boy—poor Tóssia!"

She stroked his cheek tenderly. "Why did you not come to me at once?"

"Pride and obstinacy . . . you know how I am. You hurt me with that American. I saw him kiss your hand on the steppe. You were out with him all alone—with your violin. It made me suffer. But this morning something broke in my heart. I remembered our childhood, and how you had been my only friend. . . . And I thought perhaps I had been mistaken—about the American, I mean."

"You were, Tóssia. There has never been anything serious between us. I admit I flirted with him a little. Forgive me, dear, for that. As for that day on the steppe, I had thoughtlessly made him a promise—on the day of his arrival—to play for him. He *did* kiss my hands, but only in jest. I'm so sorry it made you suffer. Stepán Geórgévich is interesting, and, I think, good-hearted, but *I love you!* There, there, don't cry, my darling! I am your friend, your loyal friend. I'll stick to you to the last— Tell me now—have you been to your father?"

"I haven't been to any one yet. Mama will tell him later. . . . I do not believe he will help me. . . . His favorite theory is that people must take the consequences of their own acts. And we are already on bad terms. . . . He will be furious when he hears of this."

"Your sister, then."

"To Mússia? She and I have never had anything in common. She does not understand me at all."

"I mean to Eléna."

"I couldn't. . . . Eléna . . . you see . . . I quarreled with Evgénia, and Eléna reproved me. I was almost beside myself. I pointed a pistol at her. She forgave me. Yet somehow . . ."

"Oh! I am sorry. Eléna is so good . . . so deep and understanding. You must go to her. She will help us; two heads are better than one, and perhaps three better than two. Shall I come over after breakfast and speak to her?"

"As you think best. I must tell them all to-day. Oh, Naddi, Naddi!" he groaned.

She took him to her bosom and soothed him like a little child, giving him many pats and touches, caressing and kissing his hair

and eyes and cheeks. He turned away, passing his hand across his eyes.

"*Proshchdetè!*" (Farewell.)

"*Do svidània*, Tóssia, my darling. I will be over after breakfast. At about nine-thirty; keep up heart . . . everything will come out right in the end."

A long embrace . . . a kiss . . . their first—the door closed softly after him.

But after he was gone Nadiézhda's optimism fell. Makedónsky was powerful, and full of implacable hatred because of Anatól's relation to his mistress.

Anastásia's pale face, the tired eyes, the *retroussé* nose, the passionate red lips and siren smile rose up before her, and anger came into her. What right had *she*, a woman who had evidently "lived," to come into this poor boy's life, to wreck and ruin it? . . . The animosity of her sex against other women was sharpened and intensified by her love for Tóssia. For she *did* love him; she knew it now. She determined that Tóssia should break off with Anastásia Aleksándrovna, and by hook or crook, despite Makedónsky's enmity, keep his position in the army. . . . He had come to her as his only friend, to help and save him. His hope, his expectation should not be in vain. And all woman's passionate instinct of protection for that which forms the object of her love surged up within her. To help Tóssia—only to help him!

2

"What was all that noise downstairs early this morning, Naddi?" asked Vera, languidly, at the breakfast table that morning. Neither Piótr Samóilovich nor her husband had come down; Sasha had breakfasted and gone. "I heard you go downstairs. It must have been about six o'clock. What happened? Did any one come?"

"Yes," responded Nadiézhda monosyllabically, continuing to drink her coffee.

"Why so communicative?" asked Vera ironically, bending on Nadiézhda her cynical, mocking gaze.

Nadiézhda did not at first answer. She was thinking. Could Vera help her?

"Well?" asked Vera sharply. "Am I worth an answer, or am I not?"

"Anatól Borísovich came, if you are so anxious to know."

Vera put down her cup. "*Anatól Borisovich?*" she repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes."

"At six o'clock in the morning?"

"Precisely!"

"But, great Heavens! Why so early?"

"He is to be court-martialed, perhaps dismissed from the army, probably at the instigation of Makedónsky."

"Of Makedónsky? Is Makedónsky his enemy?"

"It seems so."

"But why? *Bózhè mói!* I never heard a word of it!"

"A private quarrel," Nadiézhda was noncommittal.

"It is something to do with Anastásia Aleksándrovna, I'm sure!" cried Vera acutely.

"Perhaps!"

"It is terrible!" For once Vera spoke with real feeling. "What does he intend to do?"

"He doesn't know yet. I am planning to have some one intervene with Makedónsky; some one who can influence him—I don't know who. . . ."

"I know!" said Vera suddenly.

Nadiézhda looked up quickly.

"Who?"

"Eléna. His sister."

"Eléna? I thought of going over to talk it over with her this morning. I hadn't thought of *her* interceding. Why should *she* intercede? She scarcely knows Makedónsky at all."

"Since you were a little girl," began Vera, with elder-sister severity, "it has been your custom to make rash statements utterly unbased on facts. Eléna as good as admitted to me only a few days ago that Makedónsky loved her!"

"Ah!"

"So, if you want to get at him you can do it through her. You must persuade her to go to him."

"Thank you, Vera, for telling me," said Nadiézhda gratefully, as she rose from the table.

"Not at all! Why should I keep it back? God knows I have no ill-feeling against the boy. . . . Indeed, I am sorry that this terrible thing has happened to him. If there is anything I can do, I shall be glad to do it."

"*Spasíbo* (Thank you), Vera," answered Nadiézhda, bending over and kissing her on the cheek.

Vera said nothing. Caresses were rare indeed between them.

But Tóssia's misfortune had for the moment brought the sisters closer.

3

When Nadiézhda arrived at the Malinóffsky villa she found Ekaterína Ivánovna sitting on the balcony, reading the newspaper and smoking her eternal cigarette.

The weazened, squirrel-like little face peering out over the top of the big paper was very sad.

"Zdrástè, Ekaterína Ivánovna."

"Zdrástè, Nadiézhda Petróvna. You are out early this morning."

"I came over to see Eléna. Is she up?"

"Yes. She and Tóssia are together in her room. They are talking over private matters."

"I am glad to hear that. I mean——"

"The poor boy told you that he is in terrible trouble?" asked the little old woman, her lips quivering. She looked so old and gray, so wrinkled and withered, so care-laden and grief-full, that Nadiézhda's heart went out to her.

"Yes. I am so grieved for him. I came to talk it over with Eléna."

"It is all the fault of that actress!" Ekaterína burst out with sudden fury. "I felt that trouble would come from her presence the very day of her arrival. When Tóssia brought her to me, announcing she was his friend from Warsaw, I expected nothing good of it. And when I saw her actions—all her flirtation, and her loud and shameless talk about the stage before every one—never a thought if it was agreeable or not to me—in view of the relation with Tóssia that she actually advertised! And in private she comes to me, and tells me that she and Tóssia are 'engaged'; and calls me 'Mother,' and kisses me good morning and good night. I wash my face with soap and water after every kiss, you may be sure of *that*! A woman who paints her lips!"

"She comes from another world," said Nadiézhda, thoughtfully.

"Yes; and she shows it. . . . Such siren glances—such smiles and flirtations with every man she meets!"

"With whom, for instance?"

"With whom? With every one! With the Prokurór, for instance. It is actually indecent the way she carries on with him! She is worse than that shameless Nina. . . . And his wife doesn't like it—you may be sure of that! And when Klara Petróvna, at my request, went to her and begged her not to encourage the

Prokurór's attentions, because his wife was so jealous, and it made trouble—do you know how she answered her?"

"'Oh, we have to *educate* her,' said she. 'We have to *educate* her! . . .'"

"You needn't hold *that* against her!" replied Nadiézhda scornfully. "It isn't even original. . . . That Conservatory girl, Nina Sergiévna, said the same thing to my sister Vera. They've probably been talking together. . . . Birds of a feather, you know!"

Ekaterína Ivánovna only "made with the hand," hopelessly.

"Poor Ekaterína Ivánovna!" cried Nadiézhda. Her sympathy was tinged with humor as she realized the abyss between this quiet, respectable, little old lady, brought face to face with the standards of the bohemian world, and Anastásia Aleksándrovna.

"Yes. It's hard when you've brought up a son with such difficulties, such care, and expense, and thinking, and planning; it's hard, Nadiézhda Petróvna, to have all your hopes and dreams dashed to the ground by a painted actress who comes from God knows where, to bring your boy to wreck and ruin. Little does *she* care if she ruins his career—she has a mind like a bird. This very morning she said to me, 'We will go off and start a new life together, "Mother"; the army is not good for Tóssia, anyway. We'll go to Petersburg, and he'll set up as a Doctor on his own account, and he'll make money—he'll be glad of this some day,' said she, with her assumption of wisdom—to *me!* *Uvý! Uvý!*" (Alas!)

Ekaterína Ivánovna hastily brushed away her tears from beneath her big round spectacles, just as Eléna came out.

"Oh, *zdrástè*, Naddi!" Eléna cried, as she caught sight of the visitor. "I am so glad to see you! Tóssia told me he had spoken to you. . . . I was just going over to see you myself, to lose no time. Will you come up to my room, so we can talk undisturbed, or shall I go over to your house?"

"I will come up to your room," rejoined Nadiézhda, as they kissed affectionately. "I came over purposely to see you."

So the two girls went upstairs to Eléna's room. There Eléna made Nadiézhda sit in the big leather armchair near the window, while she herself, according to one of her youthful customs, sat cross-legged, like a Turk, upon the bed.

"Poor Tóssia!" began Nadiézhda, with a sigh.

"Yes!" said Eléna sadly. "I have just been having a long talk with him; one of the heart-to-heart kind, you know. His father won't even see him! It has been long since we talked; I have been rather cold with him ever since—he pointed a

revolver at me about a week ago. He was frantic, and threatened to blow out my brains. . . . I forgave him for it. . . . And yet . . . it frightened Mama so when she heard. . . . He wept on my shoulder and begged my forgiveness so humbly—poor, dear, unhappy boy!”

“Did he tell you about—*her*—and—Makedónsky?”

A troubled expression came over Eléna’s face.

“Yes,” she replied in a low voice, gazing over Nadiézhda’s head through the open window.

“What do you think of it?”

“It is a bad business. I do not know what to advise him.”

“What kind of a man is this Makedónsky, anyway?” asked Nadiézhda innocently, watching Eléna’s face through half-closed lids.

Eléna flushed faintly.

“He is a very strange man. I do not understand him myself.”

“Do you think he really cares for that actress? Tóssia says she is not even his wife.”

“I do not know, of course. As to her being his wife, I overheard her, at Vera’s birthday party, insisting that marriage is totally unnecessary, if you can judge by that.”

“It is certainly some indication. Do *you* know Makedónsky yourself?”

This abrupt question caught Eléna unprepared.

“No—yes—that is—I *have* known him—when I was a young girl,” she answered confusedly. “I have really spoken to him only once or twice in the Park since his arrival.”

“Oh, yes—I think I remember. The first day he arrived; when he left an admiring group of officers and went up and spoke to you. Many fair ladies of Slaviánsk envied you that morning—you may be sure of that! And have you done nothing to keep up the acquaintance since?”

“No.” Eléna was now on her guard, for she saw where Nadiézhda’s questions were tending.

“So you feel you do not know him well enough to go to him to intercede in your brother’s behalf?” asked Nadiézhda suddenly. Tensely she awaited Eléna’s reply.

“Oh, no! I couldn’t do that!” Eléna grew pale.

“For old acquaintance’ sake?” finished Nadiézhda, gazing at her relentlessly.

“Oh, no—I couldn’t—indeed I couldn’t,” insisted Eléna in distress. “I would do anything to help Tóssia, but I couldn’t do that—I couldn’t go to Makedónsky—I couldn’t!”

"Why not?" demanded Nadiézhda. "I would, if I knew Makedónsky and if it were *my* brother!"

"I couldn't go to Makedónsky. I couldn't, I couldn't!"

"I am sorry," replied Nadiézhda coldly, hiding ill her disappointment. "Can you at least think of any one who *could* influence Makedónsky?"

"No one—unless. . . . Do you think Anastásia Aleksándrovna herself——"

"The actress woman? The cause of all the trouble? I think if *she* tried to intercede for the man who—who—well, whom Makedónsky believes to be her lover, she would but add fresh fuel to the flame. Don't you?"

"I am afraid so," admitted Eléna sadly, with hanging head.

"Do you know any one in Petersburg or Warsaw who knows him?"

"Yes—but not well enough for that. And then, supposing Makedónsky denies that the dismissal is due to him?"

"Well," decided Nadiézhda, rising, "I see but one alternative."

"What?" Eléna gazed at her hopefully.

"Namely, to go to him myself."

"To go to him *yourself*! But you don't even know him!"

"What of it? You, who are Tóssia's own sister, know him, and *you* won't go. And your father prefers to live up to his theories rather than to help his son. *Somebody* has to do *something*, you know!" she declared, somewhat sharply. "The boy is perfectly sick and desperate. The matter cannot remain as it is. It is unjust—monstrous! Let Makedónsky feel that Tóssia has some friends who will stand up for him. I have friends in Petersburg, of Makedónsky's own circles. People of wealth and power, whose disapproval he may not be so ready to incur. . . . *Proshchdetè!*" (Farewell.)

"*Proshchdetè!*" Eléna jumped to her feet and came to Nadiézhda. "Naddi—I am afraid—I feel that you blame me for not going to Makedónsky myself. . . ."

"Did I criticize you?"

"No, but I see it in your manner. . . . Believe me, dear, I have strong reasons for not undertaking such a mission. Please believe that, Nadiézhda. . . . I would give my heart for Tóssia, you know."

"Never mind!" replied Nadiézhda, relenting, as she kissed her. "I imagined you must have motives. Which, for all I know, may do you credit. In any case, I shall go to Makedónsky myself."

"But where will you see him?"

"Possibly in the Park. I'd rather there than elsewhere. I shall simply seek him out."

"Oh, Naddi, you are so strong and energetic. I am ashamed before you."

"*Pustiakt!*" (Trifles!) "There, kiss me again and wish me good luck! And don't cry—I haven't told you yet that Tóssia and I are as good as engaged. In fighting for him, I am fighting for my very own."

"Oh, good luck to you, Naddi. . . . Good luck to you!"

The two girls embraced, and Nadiézhda left.

4

Straight now to the Park Nadiézhda went. She did not wish to lose a second's time. The music (it was now ten o'clock) had already begun. As she came around the Kursal corner, she put up her lorgnette and scrutinized the esplanade. It presented its usual multicolor, ceaseless promenade to the music's strains. There were several officers, but she could not distinguish Makedónsky's commanding figure among them.

Makedónsky—Makedónsky. . . . She saw many persons whom she knew, but her impatience to catch sight of the man she sought was so intense that she had eyes for no one else.

She had quite given up all hopes of meeting Makedónsky, and was already contemplating flight, to fold her poor boy in her soft woman's arms, and console his anguish, when Makedónsky arrived.

He walked alone, tall and powerful, his heavy brows beneath his high-visored cap knit and frowning; his mouth set in hard, straight lines. He was evidently in a bad humor; every now and then he lashed his spurred boots with his short, thonged whip.

He greeted but few, an officer, general or colonel; Prince Tatárinoff and Liúba Yermoláeva, before whom he stopped, exchanging courtesies. Something in Liúba's manner, as she spoke with him, told of attraction here; she was more animated than usual, her graciousness more marked. But Makedónsky was *distract*, even as he talked and jested; and soon he saluted and passed on, oblivious to the many eyes that followed him.

This was Nadiézhda's opportunity. Her heart throbbing, she came forward bravely to meet him. The interview which she had so resolutely undertaken seemed to her suddenly a matter of tremendous difficulty.

Makedónsky's eyes rested on her face for a moment (for

Nadiézhda's dark and glowing type was extremely interesting) with cold approval, which flamed into white astonishment when Nadiézhda stopped before him.

"Your pardon! This is Colonel Makedónsky?"

"Makedónsky, Mademoiselle, at your service!"

"Colonel Makedónsky, may I have a few moments' conversation with you—*privately*?"

Makedónsky gazed at her keenly.

"*Pozháluiста!*" (If you please!) "Here, or elsewhere?"

"I thought perhaps you would not mind accompanying me up this avenue which leads to the gate. There are benches vacant there."

"*Pozháluiста!*"

Makedónsky, a finished man of the world, was courteous beyond reproach—she could find no fault upon that score! Undoubtedly, also, he knew who she was; possibly he had been present at one of the concerts at Petersburg, in which she had taken part.

They turned off to the left and walked slowly on together side by side. Nadiézhda knew that hundreds of eyes were following them—that envy, slander, backbiting were already busily at work; but of this she had no heed.

5

"Colonel," began Nadiézhda resolutely, though painfully conscious of a trembling running through her limbs. ". . . I must begin by telling you who I am."

"Unnecessary, Mademoiselle. You are Nadiézhda Petróvna Danílova, already known as a young violinist of promise in the artistic circles of St. Petersburg."

She smiled at him almost gratefully—he made it so much easier for her.

"Since you know who I am, you will understand that it is not my custom to accost unknown officers in public to demand an interview——"

Makedónsky's blonde mustachios twitched, but the rest of his face remained impassive.

"Quite so, Mademoiselle. Quite so. Most certainly!"

"Without a very good reason," finished Nadiézhda triumphantly. "In this case, I will state at once the reason, so that there may be no misunderstanding between us—I desire to speak to you about the son of Dr. Malinóffsky."

A flame flashed across Makedónsky's cold face, and immediately flickered out, leaving it as impassive as before.

"Ah?" was all he said, raising his heavy eyebrows ever so slightly.

"Anatól Borísovich, as you undoubtedly know"—she paused, but Makedónsky made no sign, "has been summoned before a Court Martial at Warsaw."

"Indeed," commented Makedónsky, guardedly and politely, as he cut at his high cavalry boots with his officer's thong.

"He does not want to commit himself!" Nadiézhda's perceptions telegraphed instantly to her brain. "You must bring him into the open!"

"Let us be frank with one another," she said suddenly. "I know positively that it is you who are responsible for his dismissal."

Makedónsky turned full upon her glowing face a cold, haughty and masterful gaze.

"And supposing—it is a mere supposition—that this were so: I fail to see——"

"Why I should come to you? I came because Anatól Borísovich is my friend, and because I know that he has been done a cruel wrong. Wait!" she went on hastily, as she saw his lips part to reply, "let me say what I have to say and then I shall expect your answer. Anatól Borísovich in Warsaw made the acquaintance of your—of Anastásia Aleksándrovna."

"Your pardon!" exclaimed Makedónsky, in a harsh, imperious voice, with which no man had ever addressed her before. "We will keep the name of Anastásia Aleksándrovna out of the discussion, if you please!"

"But I must explain!" cried Nadiézhda, with a sudden feeling of helplessness. "You are under a misapprehension; you think certain things which are not true. Will you not allow me to show you—to explain?"

"I need no explanation! Shall we consider this interview at an end?"

He was already rising to go.

"Wait!" she exclaimed desperately. "You must hear me! Eléna Borísovna sent me to you herself——"

Again that strange white flame flashed over Makedónsky's face; slowly he sank down again, his sword clattering upon the bench.

"Eléna Borísovna sent you?" he said in an odd tone. "Why did she not come herself?"

"You are on the right track!" exulted Nadiézhda inwardly.

"She did not come to you for reasons of delicacy, which only you are in a position to understand. So I, who am the friend both of her and of her brother, came to be her spokesman and his. But I seem to have been but a bad advocate after all, for you will not even listen to me."

"Go on," said Makedónsky, gravely, as she paused for breath. "I am ready to listen now; I did not understand! For all I knew, you were an utter stranger who, knowing Anatól Borísovich, undertook to meddle. Continue, please."

"Colonel Makedónsky," said Nadiézhda firmly, "Anatól Borísovich has been guilty of no wrong to you: that is all I came to say. A certain person, since I must name no names, was unhappy. Her unhappiness, coupled with a certain childishness, caught Anatól Malinóffsky's attention; appealed to his sympathy. This sympathy she totally misunderstood. She thought that Anatól, that Doctor Malinóffsky was in love with her; and so, unhappy and lonely, so far from her own home, she came to him as to a refuge, unsolicited and even undesired, after you had been gone from Warsaw for weeks. Knowing that she had sought and received Anatól's sympathy, you threatened to 'break' him, which means, I suppose, dismissal from the army—the end of his career. When you arrived here and found that she had actually come to him, you decided to carry out your threat at once, and your power was such that you were able to attain your object without delay. But your ground for ruining him was utterly mistaken. Anatól Borísovich does not love you—the person in question—never has loved her; he has done you no injury or harm; I have it from his own lips, and he would never lie to me. But you, Colonel Makedónsky, have done him a cruel wrong, and I call upon you, before the face of God and man, to set it right!"

She paused, breathing quickly, swept away by feeling and by the inspiration of her own words, which came to her easily and quickly, without effort; and gazed at Makedónsky challengingly, imploringly.

"Nadiézhda Petróvna," said Makedónsky, after a silence, in which their wills met and battled, "in this blind old world of ours, only one thing counts. That is human character. Mood. Words, arguments, blame, reproaches, advice—all that is nothing. We must always take into account the personal element. *Nu*, I have my own character; you might find some difficulty in understanding it. To me it is a matter of supreme indifference

whether young Dr. Malinóffsky—I will use your euphemism—has actually wronged me or not.”

“But then, why——?”

“Hear me, Mademoiselle! A matter of supreme indifference. Other men may care for that; they are weaker than I. And other men meet with the ordinary fate of mortals who indiscreetly take young and pretty women to themselves. These women, if dissatisfied with their—shall we say—married life, may seek and find consolation and sympathy in the arms of others. *But I am Makedónsky!*”

With an air of haughty pride Makedónsky threw back his head as he pronounced these words; his blazing eyes sent forth white fire.

“Yes, I am Makedónsky!” he repeated proudly, as, gazing at him fascinated, she remained silent. “And I am known. Makedónsky’s reputation, if I may seem vainglorious, has spread through Russia. I am no ordinary mortal. Men tremble before me. I have fought a dozen duels; I have on my body honorable scars. I bear a bullet in my head which, if I live, may some day drive me mad; the thought of it leaves me unmoved. Am I a man to brook interference by another man with my private life? He must be a bold man who dares to proffer consolation to a woman on whom Makedónsky has set the stamp of his possession. In ordinary cases I would shoot such a man dead—it would not be the first time I have taken human life. But Anatól Borísovich, first of all, is young; secondly, he is not of my own rank; thirdly, and above all, he is the brother of Eléna Borísovna, whom I know and whom—I like. You see, I am frank with you,” he added, with his sudden, flashing smile.

“But,” he continued, “neither Anatól Borísovich nor any other must think such audacious insolence can be allowed to go unpunished. I am Makedónsky! I am powerful, more so than many people think: so powerful” (he smiled oddly) “that you might compare me to a kind of Russian Jove. I am angered. Lo! I hurl my thunderbolt, and my enemy lies groveling in the dust. Yesterday he was something; in two weeks he will be nothing. Anatól Borísovich will soon not have the right to exhibit publicly the uniform he wears. And that will teach him to choose no future Makedónskys when he begins affairs with the women whom he insolently and heedlessly dares to ‘console!’”

Silently Nadiézhda gazed at him. She felt shrunken. This man was big—overpowering. His cold and haughty disdain, yet

his white-hot flame of passion; his triumphant power, his absolute belief in his own superiority to all mankind——

She got up slowly, unfurling her parasol. Makedónsky rose at once.

"So you will not take any action to have this order of dismissal revoked?" she asked in a low, almost timid voice.

"No, Mademoiselle. I shall take no steps whatever."

"Not even——" (She shot her last bolt) "not even for the sake of Eléna Borísovna?"

"Not even for the sake of Eléna Borísovna!" came the inexorable response.

"I see," said Nadiézhda, examining attentively the handle of her parasol. "Thank you for discussing the matter with me."

"*Do svidánia!*" he replied, glancing keenly at her downcast, almond-shaped eyes, veiled with the long black lashes that shaded the oval cheeks, beneath which a hot, rich current of blood glowed through the delicate, transparent skin.

CHAPTER XI

I

THE great event of the Slaviánsk season, after the Procession of the Cross, was by long traditions the Charity Ball.

For weeks beforehand ladies and students had been disposing of an unlimited stock of tickets at unlimited, skyrocket prices.

The dressmakers in Slaviánsk had been busy for weeks helping to prepare for the great event.

Liúba Yermoláeva had imported a special gown from Moscow (it was said), at a fabulous price.

Nadiézhda Petróvna and her sister, Vera, had the house full of dressmakers—the destined result was wrapped in mystery.

Eléna Borisovna declined to tell what she would wear.

Everybody planned something to ensure her own special and individual triumph.

Every one was gay and animated, full of happy anticipations. Except Nadiézhda and Eléna, who were grieving over Tóssia.

Tóssia, pending his departure to Warsaw, was in a disquieting state. He was more taciturn and somber than ever. His father, momentarily waiving his inexorable principles after a Titanic storm, had written to Petersburg and Warsaw in his son's behalf, and in his usual grim and impassive silence awaited replies. Eléna had told Tóssia of the ill-success of Nadiézhda's self-imposed mission to Makedónsky. He had made no comment, but the burning gaze of his tragic brown eyes hurt both the girls, who suffered for him, as though the wound were theirs. Which, of course, didn't help Anatól; he was too plunged in his inner world of sorrow and despair to care if any one pitied him or not. He even began to avoid Nadiézhda again, slinking away early in the morning to the steppe, walking for miles and miles to remote, out-of-the-way villages, and coming back, dog-tired and mud-stained, at night. Twice Nadiézhda, despite her busy state, came over to see and comfort him, but she could never find him at home. A note she left for him brought no response.

"The poor boy feels terribly about his uniform," said Eléna, the second time Nadiézhda came.

"His uniform?"

"Yes. He feels that he has no right to wear it."

"But why? He has not even been court-martialed yet!"

"Yes. But he is sure that the verdict will be against him. That's why he spends his whole time on the steppe. He will never be able to endure the shame of taking it off, and yet he will no longer have the right to wear it."

"Did he tell you anything about it?"

"Yes—only the other day. He cried like a child. 'I shall be disgraced!' he sobbed. 'I shall be disgraced!' he kept repeating. 'I shall lose the right to wear my uniform!' It was the thing that seemed to hurt him most. I suppose it is a kind of symbol for him. It would break his heart to have to show himself to all the people who know him in ordinary clothes. I am so worried about him, Naddi, I can't keep my thoughts away from him. Did you write to Petersburg as you planned?"

"Yes, to every one who I thought could help him. One letter went to a friend of my cousin, who is an officer of the guard; I am hoping against hope that he may be able to do something; I fear, however, that Mak—that the influence against him is too strong."

Eléna made no answer. The tacit agreement had arisen between them not to mention Makedónsky's name.

2

The day of the ball arrived.

At about half past eight in the evening Eléna was in her room, standing before the mirror of her dressing table, adding the finishing touches under the admiring supervision of the sly little Muscovite maid, who declared with fervor that Eléna would be the belle of the ball, when she heard Anatól's heavy, slouching step coming up the hall.

She ran to the door, threw it open; looked out into the hall.

It was, as she surmised, her brother. He came to a dead stop; cast at her bare and lovely arms and shoulders a somber gaze.

"Oh, Tóssochka, is that you? I was just getting ready to go to the ball. Naddi and Vera were coming over to get me."

"Why did you ask *them*?"

She gazed at him in surprise.

"I did not want to go alone. And you had been so much away—I did not think *you* were going. . . ."

"Have I not as much right to go as any one?" he asked, so violently that she shrank away.

"Why, yes, Tóssia dearest," she answered soothingly; "I am sure you have. You have been away so much of late I just didn't know, that is all."

"Well, I am going!" he flung back, his brown eyes rolling, his lips, beneath his light mustache, all of a-tremble. "Are you ready?"

"Just a minute, Tóssia."

She withdrew into her room, closing softly the door behind her. As she patted and smoothed her dark and waving hair, and adjusted the lace on her breast, her thoughts were busy. Her brother's attitude and his state of mind, thereby reflected, disquieted her. He was in a mood which boded no good to any one. Makedónsky—if Makedónsky were there—! What should she do?

"He never goes anywhere in Slaviánsk. He stays away from everything. Perhaps he will not be there!" her mind sought to console her.

"I promised to dance with him—he will come for that," her instinct told her.

"Are you coming?" came Tóssia's deep bass through the closed door.

"Yes, yes, at once!" she cried hastily. "Aniúta, give me my cloak!"

"They' are so beautiful!" exclaimed Aniúta, clasping her hands in ecstasy, as Eléna cast at her a smile of farewell. "Your dress—it is like a flame!"

"Like a flame!" To-night, indeed, her whole being, physical as well as psychical, was wreathed in flame—a double flame; the scarlet of the dress in which she had danced with Makedónsky; the red glow of expectation which burned through all her senses. . . .

As she opened the door, she heard gay voices, trills of laughter, continuing up the stairs. Vera and Nadiézhda had arrived. She went forward to meet them. When, after salutations were exchanged, she turned to find Tóssia, she saw that he had momentarily disappeared.

"Tóssia, Tóssia!" she called.

"Tóssia. Is Tóssia going?" cried, in lowered voices, both Vera and Nadiézhda together.

"Yes, he came back early to-night, apparently determined to go."

"I don't like it; I am afraid," began Nadiézhda, anxiously. "Makedónsky——"

"Sh!" hissed Vera. "Here he comes!"

The door of Anatól's room opened and slammed, his heavy step resounded up the hall; the click of spurs could be distinguished, the metallic rattle of a sword-scabbard striking against the hardwood floor.

"*Bózhè mói!* He has put on his sword!" cried Eléna, in anguish.

"That has no significance," said Vera, in her cool, cynical tones. "All officers wear swords at balls. We shall stay with him all the evening. No need to be alarmed. *Zdrástè, Andtol!*" she cried, as Tóssia's big bulk loomed up before them in the dimly lighted hall.

"*Zdrástè!*" he growled morosely.

"Greetings, Tóssia!" said Nadiézhda softly, in her turn, going up to him and offering him her hand. "I haven't caught a glimpse of you for days!"

"So much the better for you!" he growled, as his fingers, hot and feverish, closed over her small, ringed hand.

"Oh, Tóssia, how can you say such things? Do you think I don't know——"

"Come, *Gospodd!*" cried Vera briskly. "It is time to be off, if we are going to witness the performance. Did you order a carriage?"

"Yes. Wasn't it waiting when you came in?"

"No. Perhaps it will be there now."

Lifting their light skirts daintily to avoid the dirt of the graveled way, the three girls tripped down toward the gate in the wake of Anatól, who strode grimly on ahead.

The grassy esplanade was dark and silent. It was a warm and starless night; the shadows of the trees lay over all. As they stood there all together before the gate, their ears caught the far-off sound of bells.

"That is our *izvóshchik*," said Vera, with a conviction justified by the emergence of that vehicle, drawn by double-yoked horses and driven swiftly over the grassy ruts, the bells from the high *dúga* (yoke) tinkling and pealing merrily.

The driver, with a wide sweep, drove directly toward them, drew up before the gate and held his long whip high.

"Villa Malinófsky? Villa Malinófsky?" he called in a hoarse, vodka-burned voice.

"Yes! Yes!" they cried back to him.

Anatól, preserving the same grim silence, assisted each of them in turn to ascend; Eléna got in last.

"*Poshól!*" (Go!) cried Anatól suddenly, in his deep and growling voice, to the driver, who cracked his whip, lashed his horses and started off at a gallop.

"But Tóssia!" exclaimed Eléna. "Why didn't he come?"

"Sh!" whispered Nadiézhda. "Don't let Vera know. I completely forgot the poor boy hasn't any money. I ought to have thought of it. He couldn't ride with three women and let them pay."

"Poor Tóssia!" sighed Eléna, wiping her eyes. "My heart is broken over him. If only Papa's friends could help him; if only he could be given a new start!"

3

The Kursal was brilliantly lighted. The gleaming irradiation from the three wide stairways, cut into the darkness a triple path of gold. Carriages which had driven in through the wide east and west gates of the Park were constantly drawing up. From them alighted officers, beautiful ladies, and civilians; most of the students came on foot. The main pavilion-balcony was black with a surging throng. The cloak-room, just inside, was besieged. Through the open doors of the Kursal auditorium came the inspiring strains of music, dispensed by the Park orchestra which, for this occasion, had moved its habitat.

Inside, the big, vaulted hall was already crowded to suffocation; even the galleries were rapidly being filled. Movable chairs had been put in for the occasion; the floor was as smooth as glass.

The electric buzzer, shrill and importunate, sounded. The last waves of the surge of auditors washed in; the doors were closed. The orchestra broke into the solemn strains of *Bózhè Tsarid Khroni!* (God save the Tsar!); the audience rose *en masse*.

*Bózhè Tsarid khroni!
Sílno derzhávy!
Tsárstvui na slávu,
Na slávu nam!*

Suddenly a long, loud, continuous sound, as of escaping steam, rose from the galleries.

"What is that?"

"The students! They are hissing the Tsar's anthem."

"Good for them!"

"The music is trying to drown them."

"No, they are hissing louder than ever."

"Shame! Shame!"

"An outrage!"

"Drive them out"

"Send for the gendarmes!"

"They need the Cossacks—that's what *they* need!"

An indescribable confusion reigned. Suddenly, loud, clear, and triumphant, rose the wild and savage harmony of the *Dubínushka*.

*"Ei, Dubínushka úkhnem,
Samá paidiót, samá paidiót!"*¹

"Look! the curtain has been rung up."

"Who's that coming out?"

"It's the Slaviánsk director."

"He's talking."

"Trying to talk, you mean!"

"*Gospodá!*"

*"Ei, Dubínushka, úkhnem!
Samá paidiót, samá paidiót!"*

rang out the fierce exultant chorus; like a fusee of fire it ran all around the galleries.

"*Gospodá!* Allow me. I should like——"

Samá paidiót! Samá paidiót!

"*Gospodá!*"

"S-h-h!"

"Let him talk!"

"Sh! Sh-h!"

Little by little the singing died out; silence fell.

"*Gospodá!*" said the director. "I cannot express my great grief and consternation that this night, which represents the highest and most brilliant moment of the Slaviánsk season, should have been chosen by some of the audience for an unpatriotic and rebellious demonstration——"

"Ss-ss-ss!" rose a loud hiss from the unquenchable gallery.

"A demonstration, which if continued, may bring disaster

¹ "Oh, the little stick with a groan and a heave will go itself!" A song originating on the banks of the Volga, sung by the loggers, and become a song of revolution.

upon the Kurort and its Director. I ask you, I impore you, *Gospodá Studénty*, to consider the feelings and desires of the majority of the large audience assembled here to-night, and to refrain from further demonstration, while the orchestra completes its rendition of our national anthem."

Bowing low, he withdrew with dignity, and again the curtain fell.

The anthem began again.

Again the galleries, though in smaller numbers, began to hiss and sing; but a counter opposition began below, so vigorous that the galleries were silenced:

*God save our gracious Tsar,
Mighty defender!
Reign he for Glory,
For Glory aye!*

"This scene reminds me of what occurred in Khárkoff in 1906," said Vera, after the audience had become seated. "Do you remember, Eléna? It was the 19th of February.¹ You know what *that* means. The streets were filled with Cossacks; they were picketed before our very houses, and camp fires were burning. I went to the theater with Papa and Sasha in the evening; and there was a terrible demonstration. The theater was crowded with students—over a thousand of them, the paper said the next day. They began the *Dubinushka* from the very start—they drowned the music; you couldn't hear a note.

"And there was the wildest confusion—people cheering and shouting like mad. Then the doors at the back of the pit flew open and the Cossacks rode in, slashing right and left, driving the audience out of the seats. Several were knocked down and trampled. There was a frightful panic. Papa and I escaped through the stage entrance. I was so frightened I couldn't sleep all night. Just imagine! the Cossacks riding on their horses, right into the theater; it was terrible! Their faces were like those of devils. I shall never forget it!"

"Alas! poor Russia!" exclaimed Eléna. "When tyranny sits upon——"

"Sh!" sibilated Nadiézhda, looking around. But it was already too late.

"Eléna Boríthovna!" howled a well-known voice in her ear. "Thuch thentimenth are the ranketh treathon! I advithe you to be carefull! If I were not a friend of your family——"

¹ The anniversary of the manumission of the Serfs by Alexander II.

Eléna turned swiftly around and found herself staring into the yellow, mandarin-like face of the Prokurór, who gazed at her with glittering black eyes, which held a menace. He sat with Mária Aleksíevna, Mme. Caclamános and the Zémsky Nachálník.

"I beg your pardon!" retorted Eléna, her face suddenly aflame. "I must call to your attention the fact that I have not addressed you in any way. Until I do so I will ask you kindly not to intrude upon my conversation with my friends!"

Whereupon, with flashing eyes, she turned around again. Vera looked at her with amazement.

"*Ya vath prothú!*" (I beg of you) the Prokurór screamed behind her excitedly, just as the curtain arose. "I am an offither of the Thar! I am a defender of the Thtate! I have a right——"

"Sh! Sh!" came fierce hisses all around him as the curtain rose. Furious, the Prokurór grew silent.

4

The play, a light comedy, was scarcely over when the audience was already rising to its feet and passing into the outer rooms adjacent to the hall. A horde of theatrical supernumeraries fell on the movable chairs and wreaked their fury on them; when their noisy rage was spent, not a chair remained in the hall.

Meanwhile, the audience was promenading back and forth in the large parallel outer hall, flanked on the terrace side by an endless chain of booths, each one of which was presided over by a houri, ravishingly attired.

Up and down, and down and up again, went the ceaseless promenade; and every moment groups detached themselves, and lingered, and bought flowers, and candy, and champagne, and butter-brods, and glasses of hot, refreshing tea. And in and out ran the little boy-pages, dressed like miniature students; across their shoulders was slung a mail-pouch, on which were inscribed the eloquent words, "*Poste d'amour.*" Little gluable folds of paper were eagerly purchased at ten kopeks per; and amidst much fun and merriment the amorous correspondence found gleeful initiation.

"Oh, just see what I got from the Prokurór!" exclaimed Mme. Caclamános to the Basilídes, who stood with her at the flower booth. She waved excitedly one of the blue slips.

They all crowded around her.

"Read! Read!"

"Listen," exhorted Mme. Caclamános, with her self-conscious, artificial little laugh. "The boy told me that when he wrote it his face was diabolic—like a madman's—"

"Though I am held in iron chains my soul is all my own!
Oh, Grecian muse, to thee, to thee, thy Philomel hath flown,
In body too, I'll be with thee upon the terrace wide,
Within an hour, if by some chance, my jailer stays inside!"

"Rendezvous in an hour with the Prokurór!" The Basilídes laughed maliciously at this new evidence of the Prokurór's virtuosity in the art of finding opportunities to escape the surveillance of his wife.

"Up to his old tricks!" mumbled old Mme. de Basilídes disapprovingly, with her toothless, wrinkled smile. "He's just like my Matviéi!"

Another person who received a letter was Earle. It was unsigned and read as follows:

"Like a being from another world you appeared before me, radiant as a god, and I worshiped you! Now I am blind and writhing and you pass me by."

"*Bózhè mói!*" muttered Earle, with vexation. "That is from Anna Isáevna. This thing is really going too far!"

"Why do you scowl so, Stephen!" asked Eléna, as she met him in the promenade. "You do not seem pleased with your correspondence."

"*Nichevò!*" (Oh, nothing!) He hastily crushed the paper in his hand and joined her, gazing at her admiringly.

"You are beautiful in that scarlet dress."

"Thank you."

"You, too, look serious. Does anything trouble you?"

"Yes." She cast at him a swift glance. "Several things."

"Can I help you?"

She turned toward him fully, her eyes lighted by a sudden thought.

"Perhaps you can. If you can, will you?"

"Yes . . . *à la mort!*"

She put one hand impulsively upon his arm.

"You are my dear, good friend. I want to find out if Makedónsky is here. And I want some one to find and keep close to my brother all the evening. You heard of his court-martial?"

"His court-martial!" Earle looked astonished. "No, not a word! This is bad news!"

"He believes that Makedónsky is responsible. He is in a bad mood. He insisted on coming. I am afraid he may quarrel with Makedónsky. Can I count on you to look after him? What complicates matters is, that I have to dance with Makedónsky."

"You *have* to?"

"I promised him," Eléna explained simply, gazing at him with deep and brooding eyes. "And probably most of the evening. You see the danger?"

"Yes!" muttered Earle, turning away from her.

"What is the matter?"

"In what way?"

"Your manner changed when I told you I have to dance with Makedónsky."

"Did it?"

"Are you offended with me? I know what it is. You disapprove of my dancing with Makedónsky."

"Who am *I* to approve or disapprove?"

"But tell me, *do* you disapprove?"

"Don't *you*?"

"Why?" Eléna tensed.

"Do you think it shows heart to dance with a man who has ruined your brother's whole career?"

"I am sorry I seem to you so heartless," flashed back Eléna, flushing angrily. "Let me inform you that I promised this evening to Makedónsky weeks ago, and I always keep my word."

"There are times when the keeping of one's word becomes a vice!"

But she had already flung away, her head up, her color high. Earle looked after her regretfully.

"Our first quarrel!" he thought. And then, "Poor child!" What right had *he* to condemn her?

And loyal to his word, as she to hers, he moved off, looking for both Anatól and Makedónsky.

In the crowd he met and passed Vera de Marly and Nadiézhda. The former bowed and threw at him a merry greeting; Nadiézhda nodded coldly. He returned her nod with a slight, impersonal

smile. He knew but too well the cause of Nadiézhda's coldness.

Down near the door he came upon Volódia Yermoláeff, dressed (*O, agricolæ!*) in a yellow *pomiéshchik's* costume; the perspiration was pouring down his broad red face and from under his black-rimmed eyeglasses in streams.

"Do you mean to say you're going to dance in that outfit?" Earle asked incredulously, as he noted the thick cloth and clumsy, half-leg boots.

"I'm going to *try* to!" wheezed Volódia, with a fatuous grin. "I'm a sacrifice to my Little Russian patriotism. Hot, very!"

"Is Liúba . . . did your mother and sister come?"

"Mama is hugging the house counting her heart-beats," answered Volódia cheerfully. "Liúba is here—didn't you see her in the crowd?"

"No. I thought she wasn't here."

"She may be on the terrace—or in the Park. Hello! there's the orchestra striking up. Are you going to dance?"

"I hope so." Earle was thinking of his promise to look after Anatól.

"*Au revoir*," said Volódia, waddling off. "I have to spread myself so that my costume may be duly admired."

On the terrace. Liúba might be on the terrace. Earle went out to look for Anatól upon the terrace.

And strangely enough, he found him there, sitting alone in a dark corner, somber and forbidding—smoking.

"*Zdrástè*, Anatól Borísovich!" greeted Earle, in friendly wise. "I have been searching for you everywhere. Your sister is worrying about you. Won't you go in and see her?"

"No!" growled Anatól, not even turning his head.

Earle came and sat beside him.

"I want to tell you," he began, "how sorry I was to hear of your trouble—about your position, I mean."

Anatól remained grimly silent, smoking fiercely.

"I have friends in Petersburg," went on Earle. "If I can help you in any way——"

"Do you know Russian proverbs?" growled Anatól, glaring up at him.

"Why, yes. Quite a number—the main ones at any rate."

"Then you've probably heard this one. *Na Bógu nadiéisia, a sam ne plos hái!*"¹

¹Lit., On God, hope, but thyself, be not slothful. The Russian equivalent of the proverb, "God helps those who help themselves!"

"A good proverb. But it has to be rightly applied."

"I can apply it right—have no fear!"

"You will apply it very poorly if you interpret it as meaning a quarrel with Colonel Makedónsky," rejoined Earle warningly, putting his hand on the young man's shoulder.

Anatól leaped to his feet in a sudden fury.

"What do *you* know about Makedónsky, and by what right do you come to give me lessons of conduct? Mind your own business, *Amerikánets*, and I'll mind mine!"

He whirled about, darkly glowering, and went away, big and broad-shouldered, a very giant of a man, despite his comparative youth.

"Absolutely impossible!" Earle muttered in English, as he rose in turn to follow Anatól's retreating form. Well, back to the lights and revelry! . . . Liúba, at least. . . .

6

The music beat like a sea of harmony from within. The orchestra had begun an enticing *valse nonchalante*.

Just as Earle reached the door, a young woman in rose ran forward to intercept him.

"Stépán!"

Earle wheeled, and felt a sudden inner shock of pleasure, as his eyes took in the loveliness of Liúba Yermoláeva. Liúba wore a French gown of rose silk, all sheen and shimmer, with a sweeping train, and a décolleté which revealed boldly shoulders as white and firmly modeled as statuary. This wonder-gown Liúba had bought in Moscow at a price which only she and one other person knew. And that other person was not even there to see it.

Filled with this immediate delight, Earle gazed at her, noting in a glance the wonderful abundance and golden richness of the hair which framed the exquisite, cameolike face like an encompassing halo; the delicate line of the brows, the flaming, sea-hued turquoise of the eyes; the finely-modeled, thin-nostriled nose; the mobile, sensuous mouth, the proud poise of the beautiful head on the long white neck; the satin smoothness of the gleaming shoulders, the rose-cloudy sheen and shimmer of the gown.

All this but for a second—and already she was speaking again.

"Stépán! I am so happy to be with you at a ball. See! I have anticipated!"

Earle's lips twitched despite himself as she held the card before his eyes. Every number, from beginning to end, was followed by the word "*Amerikdnets*."

"And I forbid you to dance with any one else!" she went on, her eyes blazing their turquoise fire into his. "To-night you are mine, and I am yours, and we are in a dream, a delicious, languorous, troubling dream—do you hear, *Amerikdnets*? And my first royal command is to buy me flowers, a fortune in flowers. I want the rarest and the costliest. You will find my love an expensive luxury, *Amerikdnets moi!*" (My American!)

"Empress! Your slave goes to buy for you a bed of roses!"

With a little laugh she put her fingertips to his lips. He kissed them and was gone.

And the girl at the flower-booth trembled with excitement when the American ordered roses, red roses, picking them out himself with practiced, expert eyes, dewy and odorous, blossomed and budded, deep heart of red to faintest flush of dawn—all interspersed with green and fern—an artistic combination which, at Charity Ball rates, came to a fabulous sum.

And Earle was rewarded by Liúba's cries of delight as she buried her face in the rich and dewy sweetness.

From the heavy coil of her golden hair she took a pin with which she fastened the fragrant, delicate things to her corsage, a vivid splash of color against the alabaster whiteness of her *décolleté*. She looked up at Earle obliquely, with a coquettish glance, from beneath her delicate, level brows, when she had finished.

"There! Am I pretty?"

"You are more than pretty—you are beautiful. You are divine and perfect, a pagan goddess come down to earth from cloudy heights! Hail, Bearer of Red Flowers!"

"My poet! I love your comparisons. Listen! They are beginning with a waltz. Let us go in and dance. Our first waltz—just imagine!"

"Our first waltz. May it not be our last, *dúshenka!*" (Little soul—darling.)

"How sweetly you called me that! Whoever taught you to make love so delightfully in Russian?"

"You!"

The vast ballroom was crowded with whirling couples. In a moment, light, graceful and rhythmical, they were off. The

music of the waltz was slow and dreamy; the lights gleamed resplendent, reflected in the polished floor; the air was warm, heavy with the scent of flowers. . . .

Liúba's lovely face was almost on his shoulder, wisps of her golden hair brushed his face; he could feel her breath, warm and fragrant, coming and going on his cheek: the rich perfume of the crimson flowers on her bare bosom made him drunk with its sweetness. . . .

As they whirled round a corner of the ballroom, Earle found himself staring into the face of a young girl with dark hair, who was dressed in red. With flushed and piquant face, she was gazing up at a tall and splendid officer of the guard arrayed in full uniform, who bent over her as they danced, and gazed intently into her deep gray eyes, which, in the brilliant light, gleamed almost black.

And suddenly she caught his glance, and stared back at him with sudden coldness and defiance. It hurt him for a moment, for this was his dear friend Eléna, and she was dancing with Makedónsky, the pitiless man who had wrecked the career of her brother beyond reparation.

"What did you say?" murmured Liúba, looking up at him.

"Nothing. Did I speak?"

"Yes. I thought you said, 'I don't understand!' What did you mean?"

"If I follow my thoughts aright, I think I must have meant women."

"Shameless one! You have such a low opinion of my sex!"

"I did not say that. I simply meant I don't understand your sex."

"But why?"

"Your code is so different."

"Our code?"

"Yes. What you think right or wrong—set off against what we men think right or wrong."

"It sounds like an accusing. Do you mean *me*?"

"No. I was thinking of some one else."

"Of whom?" asked Liúba jealously. "I won't allow thoughts of other women, you know!"

"Oh, this is just a friend," rejoined Earle evasively. "How could I think of other women—now?"

And Earle again saw Eléna and Makedónsky; she was keeping faithfully her promise, it seemed.

And once he passed Grigóri, Eléna's whilom *fiancé*, dancing

with Vera de Marly; it seemed to him that Grigóri looked ill-tempered, and that he and Vera were disputing as they danced.

Anastásia Aleksándrovna, dressed in baby blue, with a very low *décolleté*, passed him in the dreamy mazes of a waltz—she was dancing with the Prokurór, resplendent in a new white uniform with gold buttons; they were having, to all appearances, a desperate flirtation. Where—Earle wondered—was the Prokurórsha?

Lastly, he saw Volódia Yermoláeff, and smiled, in spite of his dreamy, enamored state, at that heavy individual, who was perspiring copiously, continually pushing back his black-rimmed glasses which would insist on slipping off, and at the ungraceful, elephantine leaps and bounds which he was perpetrating.

And Earle and Liúba danced Slavic dances, polkas, and quadrilles. In one of these they were linked with Eléna and Makedónsky.

Every one looked at them, these four so well suited, however paired; and approving smiles were cast at them, and many comments passed.

Liúba and Makedónsky were always subtly pleased when the chances of the dance brought them together, and Earle and Eléna (she had forgotten all her anger and vexation now; her eyes shone like stars; her cheeks were warmly flushed; her neck and throat and shoulders, modestly displayed, bloomed like a lily from the red corolla of her dress) danced gayly and spiritedly.

Earle looked on Makedónsky almost as a brother; he forgot all Tóssia's sufferings, and when the two men passed in the chain their hands gripped each other cordially, and they exchanged little smiles of mutual liking and sympathy.

So Anatól was thoroughly betrayed!

8

The morning was near. Outside, the dense, velvety blackness of the night grew pale and thin, like a threadbare cloak; the bright gleam and glitter of the star-dust dimmed on the sky's blue floor; a luminance, still shadow-swathed, grew slowly in the east, and the chirp and trill of little birds, awakened by their infallible prescience of the dawn, came floating up from the darkness of the surrounding Park.

On the terrace, all stiff and huddled up on an isolated bench, sat a lonely figure, dressed in the uniform of an army surgeon. The face beneath the high peaked yellow cap was white and

haggard; the eyes, deep-circled, gleamed with a wild and feverish light; at times a trembling shook his big form from head to foot; his teeth chattered, though it was not cold.

"Tóssia! Tóssia!"

A dark-haired girl, who had just come out of the big ballroom, flew to the lonely figure.

"O Tóssia, my darling, how I have suffered for you this night!"

His feverish eyes rested on her dark and glowing face.

"Between every dance I have flown to thee, my poor beloved boy. How couldst thou stay here all night, my unhappy darling? Sitting all crouched over on this bench, smoking insanely! How many cigarettes hast thou smoked? Hundreds, I'm sure! Thy face looks wild, completely sick. And I had to stay, because Vera stayed, and it would have seemed strange if I had gone; but I have mostly danced with girls, so that thou wouldst not feel too unhappy. As for that American, I am not even speaking to him; he has danced the whole night with Liúba Yermoláeva——"

Her flood of gossip was interrupted by Tóssia's rising, his face ghastly in the gathering light.

"Is this next dance the last?"

"Yes, *mily*."¹

"Will you dance it with me?"

Nadiézhda gazed at him astonished.

"Well!" he cried fiercely. "Don't you want to?"

"Why, yes, Tóssia. Yes, my beloved. You yourself refused the whole evening; that is why I was surprised. Of course I will dance it with you!"

"Come!" he growled; his lips trembled, and the strange shiver shook him from head to foot.

Smooth and fluent like a river of melody, somewhat slow and languid, as though the musicians' hands were weary, *malgré eux*, rose the magic measure of an old French love-waltz:

*Oh, la troublante
Volupté,
De la première
Etrein-te!*

The last dance, as the dawn faintly glimmers in through the high ballroom windows.

¹ Dear one. As near as *mily* can be rendered.

9

Before that last waltz began, Anna Isáevna sought the American out. He was standing before the champagne buffet, with Liúba and a host of others, all laughing and chattering—a merry group.

“Stepán Geór-r-r-gievich!” she said timidly, touching his arm.

He turned and gazed at her, a slight frown corrugating his brows.

“Yes?” he asked inquiringly.

“May I speak with you a moment, alone?”

With outward courtesy he assented and walked with her a few paces away.

“Stepán Geór-r-r-gievich,” began Anna Isáevna nervously, her burning gaze fixed wistfully upon his face, “I sent you a letter; you did not answer it. I have been suffering all night. I did not dare approach you. Are you angry with me?”

Earle looked at her coldly.

“Angry? Not precisely. I am sorry that—pardon the expression—you wear your heart upon your sleeve. You will never be happy in your life if you throw your love down before men who, pardon me again, have not asked for it!”

Anna Isáevna stared at him palely; her lips quivered, her eyes dimmed with a film of unshed tears.

“Yes. I know. *Spasíbo*,¹ Stepán Geór-r-r-gievich. I know I do not deserve——”

She turned suddenly without another word, and walked quickly to the back of the ballroom, to the door leading to the vestuary.

Earle’s heart smote him; he made a movement as if to follow her, checked himself, and came back to Liúba, who had been watching this little scene with jealous scrutiny.

“What did *she* want, that little Jewess?” she demanded, frowning and displeased, as Earle returned.

Earle took her arm.

“Come and dance, the musicians are beginning. She has got it into her head that she is in love with a certain man I know, and she wanted me to advise her what to do to induce him to reciprocate.”

“A certain man named Stepán Geórgievich, who does not like to betray women’s secrets,” she answered sharply. “Do you think we are all blind? All Slaviánsk knows that pretty little

¹ Thank you.

Evréika (Jewess) is madly in love with you. Why, I was told she almost fainted at Vera de Marly's birthday party when I sang that song, *Divnyia óchi*; and that all the time her eyes were fixed upon your face."

"Let's not talk of her," said Earle remorsefully. "I am afraid I hurt her feelings just now."

"And what of it? So much the better," cried Liúba cruelly. "Such a girl needs a lesson. A Jewess especially!"

"Do you hate the Jews so much?"

"Hate? No. We *despise* them in Russia. To us they are not human beings at all; they simply do not exist."

10

But then the intoxicating suggestion of that last waltz had begun; they had swept away on the polished surface of the floor; and again the dream and witchery had its hold upon him. As they danced she sang to the enervating music the suggestive burden:

Joy of the soul,
Of the sense,
When I pressed thee,
The first time,
To me!

And he stared at the sensuous lips, through which, as they softly parted, singing the burden of this light waltz, came the gleam of white and perfect teeth; and the old madness seized upon him.

"Always staring at my mouth!" said Liúba challengingly.

"I am remembering our dinner at Sviatýia Góry."

"I kissed thee well there, did I not?"

"Divinely! I shall never forget those kisses. They were our first, thou knowest!"

"They have not been our last! That afternoon in my villa, for instance. And many times since. Look, that was Anatól Borisovich we just passed, dancing with Nadiézhda Petróvna, in his uniform. Did you hear that he is to be court-martialed?"

"Yes!" Earle suddenly recalled his unkept promise to Eléna. "So he is dancing, is he? I have not seen him the whole evening. I thought he had left."

"They have stopped dancing!" said Liúba, turning her head. "They have gone into the anteroom. Anatól looks sick."

Earle turned his head just in time to see, not Anatól and Nadiézhda, but Makedónsky and Eléna Borisovna enter the anteroom. Alarm suddenly seized upon him, as he remembered what Eléna had told him.

"Quick, Liúba. Let us go to the anteroom!" he said hastily, stopping short in the middle of the dance.

"But why?" demanded Liúba displeased, as the whirling couples jostled them right and left.

"Quick! I am afraid. I saw Makedónsky go in."

Already he was striding on before. Liúba, very much vexed, ran after him.

"What dost thou mean, Stepán, spoiling our last waltz! What if Makedónsky *did* go in?"

But Earle was already entering through the heavy hangings of the anteroom.

II

Already too late.

He entered just in time to see Makedónsky, his cloak about his shoulders, lash viciously the haggard face of Anatól with the short, flexible cane which he had evidently just taken from the cloakroom; to see Anatól, a scarlet welt upon his pale face, rush forward and throw himself on Makedónsky; to witness—amidst the frightened cries of Eléna and Nadiézhda—a wild and furious struggle, culminating in a heavy blow, which Anatól struck Makedónsky in the face, so violent that Makedónsky, despite his giant's frame, staggered back, almost falling.

Now Earle was there, intervening between the two frantic men, who sought to close again, to tear and rend and trample one another under foot. Never, in all his life, had he been so glad of his physical strength as then.

"*Gospodá! Gospodá!* This is shameful! Anatól, stop it! Colonel Makedónsky, think! like workmen, in a public place. Anatól! think of your sister! Colonel Makedónsky, you are striking the brother of Eléna Borisovna!"

He kept the two combatants at a distance for a moment. Eléna, anguished, seized her brother's arm, and tried to draw him away.

"Oh, Tóssia! Thou art killing me! Why didst thou attack him?"

"I attacked him because he *sneered* at me!" cried Anatól, breathing heavily, his voice trembling with rage. "He looked at my uniform and smiled, a smile for which I will *kill* him!"

"Colonel Makedónsky," said Earle sternly, "from what I know of this case, the feelings of Anatól Borísovich are justified. And from what I know of your Russian code you must make this good!"

Makedónsky slowly drew back; stood up to his full height. He did not even look at Eléna, who still stood holding her brother's arm, as he made reply:

"Monsieur Earle, it is not my custom to meet on the field of honor men of inferior rank and social standing to my own. This young man, who will soon be dismissed dishonorably from the army of the Tsar, has attacked me, an officer of that army, struck me in the presence of witnesses, especially——" (he gestured toward Eléna, Nadiézhda and Liúba, who now stood together)—"in the presence of ladies. This, in military circles, admits of but one conclusion."

"You consent to fight?" asked Earle.

"To *fight*?" repeated Makedónsky contemptuously. "No! certainly not! Army officers in Russia—whatever may be the custom in *your* country—do not fight with cashiered army surgeons!"

"Ah!" came in a deep guttural hiss from the depths of Tósšia's massive breast, the cry of an animal that has received a new and vital wound.

"You offer him, then, no satisfaction?" pursued Earle, incredulously.

"He shall be on his way to Siberia within a week—I promise you that!" replied Makedónsky fiercely. . . . "He can congratulate himself that I do not have him shot!"

Anatól leaped forward, straining against Earle's strong arm.

"Then listen to me, by God! I swear in the presence of all these witnesses that I will have your life for this—I swear—I swear!" . . .

"I have nothing to say to you," rejoined Makedónsky, with the cold and icy contempt that stung his younger opponent like a lash. "You forgot that I am Makedónsky, and you received your punishment. . . . It seems that you were not sufficiently punished. . . . My actions speak. Farewell!"

He turned, bowed deeply to the three girls, who stood there trembling, then formally to Earle, who merely nodded his head; cast a black glance toward Anatól, turned and left the ante-room.

"What a *brute*!" exclaimed Nadiézhda furiously. . . .

"A dangerous man!" declared Earle.

Eléna's eyes fell before his frowning gaze.

"Stepán," said Liúba languidly, "take me home."

12

All through this incident, which had lasted scarcely three minutes, the amorous rhythm of the waltz had been continuing. With a quick and animated *finale*, the music fell and died away. Laughing and talking, the couples, arm in arm, crowded to the Vestibule. The great event of the season—The Slaviánsk Charity Ball—was over.

Earle went home with Liúba, who flooded him with curious questions. Why had Anatól Borísovich and Colonel Makedónsky quarreled? Was it over Eléna Borísovna? Why was Anatól to be dismissed from the army? Was it true that Makedónsky had an intrigue with an actress? Earle was almost distracted.

On the steps of her villa, shrouded in darkness, Liúba paused. "Stepán, dear, it is hard to part from thee! I have already forgotten that horrid quarrel. This night has been one long, uninterrupted dream."

She came to him in the darkness, wound soft, clinging arms around his neck.

"Stepán, I love thee! I love thee!" she cried passionately.

"My darling!" The enchantment, dispelled, returned to him like a surging flood. And his lips met hers, which sought his in the darkness.

"Why are forbidden things so sweet?" she whispered, as she drew away.

"Because they are forbidden!"

Slowly, their arms intertwined, they began to mount the stairs.

"Wait!" she murmured, when they reached the broad balcony which ran around the house.

They stood perfectly still a moment upon the balcony—quite silent. Then Liúba turned, and with a silken rustle, swept to the door. There came to Earle's ears the click and rattle of a key, the creaking of a door—

"Come!" A jeweled hand in his. A wild, rebellious thrill of expectation.

"Is that you, Liúba?" came a loud and booming voice.

"*Góspodi—Mama!*" almost hissed Liúba, pushing Earle suddenly back. "She is here for the night. Go! Go quickly! She must not find you here. . . ."

"Good night!"

A hasty, passionate, exasperated kiss.

The door closed behind her with a muffled creak.

A light blazed out from the windows, a moment later heavy hangings fell, then again darkness.

Earle stood for a moment motionless. Then he stole away through the rustling whispers of the *dvor*. The dogs barked fiercely as belated revelers passed. A furtive, slinking canine followed Earle through the dawnlit courtyard. It was the friendless dog that lay often beneath Earle's bench when he sat reading or dreaming in the Park.

13

A little later, there reverberated through the stillness a crash—the sound of breaking glass. It was followed by a loud and frightened cry. . . . Liúba and Evgénia, it appeared, had a quarrel that night. Soon after Liúba came home.

"Yes, she didn't come home till morning," gossiped in the *dvor* at eleven o'clock that day, Aksínia, Liúba's maid, to Masha, Evgénia's servant. "And a costly ball it was for her, too, if you come to it."

"How?" asked the red-faced, round-eyed Masha, leaning on her broom.

"Why, you know that beautiful lamp the Mistress brought with her from Paris—the big, pink thing that has the light inside, and the red silk shade. Empia, she said it was, which it cost a lot of money."

"Nu—what happened it?"

"I found it this morning on the floor—smashed to a thousand pieces."

"Nu, *shtò vy govóritè!*"¹

"Exactly so!" confirmed Liúba's maid, triumphant in her impression. "Five hundred rubles, if it cost a kopek!"

"She must 'a' run against it in the darkness," commented Másha solemnly.

Liúba's maid tightened her lips.

"Perhaps she did, and perhaps she didn't," she answered non-committally, as she went back to the villa. "One thing I know is, that it almost frightened Evgénia Yermoláevna out of her seven senses. She is as sick as a dog to-day."

Aksínia, after a service extending over several years, had learned to know her mistress well.

¹"Well, *what* do you say?"

CHAPTER XII

I

IT happened in the Park. Eléna had just come from her morning bath. A short way from the orchestra-square, on the path leading to the Bathing Pavilion, she met Grigóri Maksímich and Vera de Marly—a distinctly unpleasant encounter. Bravely she went forward—eyes right and head held high. Before they passed, she saw Grigóri turn his head to Vera, and say something quickly; she could see, from the mocking glance he shot at herself, that the remark had been ironical, a certainty confirmed by the clear and cruel laughter of Vera de Marly.

Her cheeks flamed; her gray eyes flashed.

She passed them with a species of fury, such as she seldom experienced, not even answering Vera's false, sweet, greeting:

"Good morning, dear. Have you already had your bath?"

The moment she passed them, her limbs seemed to give way. Trembling, she sat down on an opportune bench.

"The beast!" she exclaimed, with passionate resentment, over and over again. "The beast! the coward!"

Suddenly she began to cry.

By an odd chance, Stephen Earle, just returning from his morning swim, passed by at that moment.

"Why, Eléna! . . . What is the matter?"

She went on crying for a little, and made no answer.

"Can't you tell me what it is, Eléna?" he asked again, with mingled affection and solicitude.

She wiped her tears away with her handkerchief.

"I have been insulted!" Her voice trembled.

His expression changed.

"Insulted? By whom?"

"By Grigóri Maksímich." Quickly she told him of the meeting with Grigóri and Vera, and what she had seen.

"They laughed at me—laughed in my very face!" she finished, her tears welling again. "They had no right to laugh at me—they had no right!" she flung out resentfully.

"*He* certainly hadn't!" agreed Stephen angrily. "When did you meet them?"

"Just now. They were going down toward the Pavilion. You can see them from here; they're just going through the gate. Where are you going?"

"I'm going after them. Do you want to come?"

"Oh, no!" she stammered. "I don't want—you mustn't!"

"You don't know me!" replied Earle grimly. "No friend of mine, and especially a woman, can be insulted with impunity. You'd better come with me to confirm the accusation. You'll not be sorry; it will be interesting, I assure you!"

"Oh, Stephen, you mean—you will quarrel with them?"

"I have no quarrel with women! We will see if this Grigóri Maksímich has the courage to insult you in my presence!"

He pulled her, still hanging back, to her feet. Down the Pavilion path they walked in silence, Eléna, with lowered head, brooding over the offense.

They met Grigóri Maksímich and Vera returning, just between the gate and the Pavilion. Grigóri Maksímich looked distinctly taken aback, even alarmed, when he saw the American's expression; and more so when Earle stopped directly before him.

"My friend, Eléna Borisovna, tells me that you were pleased to make her the object of your mockery!" he began, in a clear, incisive voice. "This is so, Eléna, is it not?"

"Yes!" murmured Eléna, her cheeks aglow, her resentful eyes fixed on Grigóri's alarmed face.

"Good! Grigóri Maksímich, you will now apologize to Mlle. Malinófsky *abjectly!*"

"Indeed?" rejoined Grigóri sneeringly, with a show of defiance. "Since when have *you* become Mlle. Malinófsky's guardian?"

"That need not concern you!" came the answer, quick and sharp. "Will you apologize, or will you not?"

"I have no intention to apologize, believe me!" sneered Grigóri.

Without an instant's hesitation Earle struck him violently in the face, and he measured his length ignominiously in the dust.

Vera amazed, frightened, uttered a scream. Eléna stood by silently, but in her gray eyes shone a certain contentment.

Grigóri rose very slowly, obviously intimidated.

"*Proklídtia!*" he snarled, one hand to his face, on which a red bruise showed. "*Proklídtia!*" But he kept a respectful

distance away from the tall, athletic figure, intimidated by the clenched fists and eyes that flamed blue fire.

"Are you going to take that, Grigóri?" demanded Vera furiously.

"Why should I fight him?" queried Grigóri, lamely. "Gentlemen in Russia do not settle their differences that way. He, of course, is a foreigner and a barbarian, and knows no better."

Earle's lips twitched; then his face hardened.

"I will give you until to-morrow!" he grated, in a dangerous voice,—“to leave Slaviánsk forever. I know something of the shameful way in which you have treated Eléna Borisovna, and I consider you a vile, unmanly cur. If I meet you in Slaviánsk, after to-morrow, I will thrash you wherever and whenever I may find you. *A bon entendeur, salut!* Shall we go, Eléna?"

"Yes." Eléna slipped her arm in his. Triumphant, proud, consoled, she moved away with her protector.

2

"Oh, Stephen, I'm sorry you did that—for me!" Eléna gazed at him oddly as she spoke, a moment or two later.

"Are you? Really?" he asked simply. "*I'm* not!"

"I don't believe you are." Eléna laughed slightly.

"If he shows his face in Slaviánsk after to-morrow, I'll take him somewhere on the steppe or to the Grove, and thrash him within an inch of his life!" growled Earle, still angry.

Eléna's hand tightened around his arm.

"O Stephen, I am so *proud* that you are my friend!"

Grigóri left Slaviánsk the following day.

CHAPTER XIII

I

EARLE was sleeping soundly one night, shortly after the Grigóri episode. He had quarreled with Liúba, and had gone to bed unhappy.

Some noise awoke him at about midnight. It took him a moment to realize that some one was rapping at his window from the balcony.

Tap-tap! tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap-tap!

He sat up with a shock. . . .

The tapping continued.

He jumped out of bed, and stealing to the window, looked through the heavy hangings of lined list. The night was pitch dark; there seemed to be neither moon nor stars. But he could see that some one was standing just outside his window, though he could not make out the nocturnal visitor's identity. . . . And ever the persistent fingers rapping. A cold shiver ran over him.

"Who is there?" he called at last, in a low tone, through the window.

The rapping suddenly ceased—the black shape came closer.

"Amerikánets . . . it is I . . . open the window."

"Who—I?" he replied, suddenly angry. It was a woman's voice that had replied to his challenge.

"That damned, accursed Anna Isáevna!" he thought, hardly and contemptuously. . . . "She's crazy—she ought to be sent to an insane asylum."

"I . . . Mária Aleksíéevna!"

Mária Aleksíéevna! The *other* Psychasthenic!

He turned the handle of the high and ponderous window; the two heavy sashes swung apart.

"What is it, Mária Aleksíéevna?"

He was curious to know the object of her visit.

Mária Aleksíéevna put her head in the window; her face, dead white, almost touched his. Her strange, expressionless eyes were fixed and glassy, like those of a somnambulist. . . . Again a chill ran over him . . . there was something uncanny in this

nocturnal visit by a woman who was scarcely, if at all, in her right mind. . . .

"Come!" murmured Mária Aleksíevna.

"Come where? What for?"

"Come!" she repeated, strongly imploring.

He stood a second irresolute . . . then the mystery . . . the adventure tempted him.

"Wait!"

He dressed hastily. Within three minutes he was astride, and out of the window, preferring that means of exit to the door.

"Here I am. Now tell me, please, what is the trouble?"

"Sh!" The Psychopátka hushed him, and led the way silently across the dark and silent *dvor* . . . then out upon the dark, dew-swept, sweet-smelling steppe, where the insects chirped and fiddled, a vast and mournful cadence, beneath a funereal sky—gloom unrelieved. . . . Only the far-off barking of dogs disturbed the solemn silence of the vast and shadowy expanse.

They went on in silence. The situation at last began to get on his nerves.

"Mária Aleksíevna, where are we going? You must tell me where we are going," he said, suddenly halting. Why should he obey further the whims of this abnormal and clearly irresponsible creature?

"Come! come!" she cried wildly, already leaving him behind.

He ran ahead and caught up with her.

"Mária Aleksíevna! I insist on knowing where you are going!"

She seized him by the wrist.

"To Makedónsky. . . . To Makedónsky! . . ."

"To *Makedónsky!*" he repeated astounded. "But, *rádš Bóga*,¹ why?"

"Eléna . . . Eléna . . ." she hissed, dragging him on.

"Eléna! . . . *What* Eléna?"

"Eléna Borisovna! She has gone to Makedónsky."

"Eléna? Gone to Makedónsky?" he repeated, side by side with her. "You mean now?"

"Yes—now!"

"But why did she go? How do you know she went?"

"It came to me in a dream. . . . But I was not asleep. . . .

A voice—tell Earle!"

He stopped short.

¹For heaven's sake!

"O, it was a *dream!*"

He became vexed and angry; all his *élan* had fallen. This sick, half-insane creature had had a *dream*, and dragged him out of bed upon the strength of it. It was outrageous . . . so outrageous as almost to be ludicrous.

"Come! Come!" cried Mária Aleksiéevna, not even turning. In a moment she had disappeared in the darkness. He followed her at a walk. . . . Now that he was up and out, he might as well go on, and look after Mária Aleksiéevna.

2

Despite his fatigue, sleepiness, and general depression, the event struck his sense of humor. His mouth twitched in the darkness; then he laughed outright. "Ha! Ha! A fine position truly! I, Stephen Earle, American, of state unmarried, am cavorting round the Little Russian steppe at midnight to look after a Russian madwoman who is chasing the will-o'-the wisp of some nightmarish dream!"

"It's odd that she *had* such a dream just the same," he soliloquized, as he picked his way among the prickly furze. "But even if it were true," he thought, "I could do nothing. Eléna, let us admit, is in love with Makedónsky. Well and good; it would be none of *my* business if she should choose to visit him, at this unholy hour of the night!"

The steppe was vastly dark, immensely lonely. He heard the mournful chirping of amorous insects calling to the females of their kind by the friction of strange membranes in vibration, saw the sudden radiant glow of earthworms, due also to the same instinct, the same lure and need. Once, as he passed near a high palisaded fence, a veritable stockade, a dog rushed down the *dvor* to the fence, barking and snarling furiously.

Then he fell to thinking of the Psychopátka's strange revelation, if such it might be called.

There might be nothing in it; and yet—

He had reached the farthest end of the line of stockaded villas. There was no sign of Mária Aleksiéevna. There, for a moment, lost in the warm darkness, he stood irresolute. . . . After a moment he struck off to the right across the open steppe. Soon there loomed before his eyes a high, oblong mass. . . . It was the villa built of Crimean stone, which, as he knew from several excursions, Makedónsky had elected to make his summer home.

3

Not a light gleamed from the long façade, whose windows, empty and black, sent out here and there a momentary gleam in the deeper darkness.

"That Psychopátka was dreaming!" he thought, contemptuously, before he turned to go. If Eléna had been there, there would certainly have been a light.

What instinct of thoroughness led him to go around to the back, he does not know to this day.

An odd sensation came over him when he saw the long golden bar of light that fell from a lower window out over the steppe.

Softly he stole forward toward the radiance; crept along the wall until he crouched directly beneath the ledge, which reached to about the level of his face.

Thick hangings covered the pane; he could not see in. The window, too, was closed; but through the glass he distinctly caught the murmur of voices, one of which, beyond all question, was that of a woman. . . .

A strange feeling came upon him as he thought of the Psychopátka. Had she been warned by invisible agencies, after all?

And then he began to tremble as he thought of Eléna. For her brother's sake, undoubtedly, she had come to beg and to implore. . . . Counting on this man's chivalry and honor! How little she knew of men of such a type as this!

Swiftly he walked to the door beyond the window and rapped boldly and resolutely, three strong, firm raps.

No answer came—obstinately he rapped again.

Suddenly he heard steps from within, accompanied by the clinking of spurs; Makedónsky himself was coming to the door.

4

Immediately Earle's whole being tensed and stiffened—the familiar feeling which he had always experienced when he knew himself to be in danger.

It was only a hypothesis; he had really nothing tangible to go on; it behooved him now to be as wise as the serpent and as cunning as the fox, if he wished certainty without an open battle.

All these thoughts passed through his brain like lightning in the minute of time elapsing before Makedónsky reached the door. . . .

"Who is it?" came Makedónsky's deep voice through the door. . . .

"Is that you, Colonel Makedónsky? This is I, Stephen Earle."

"Who?" came the curt, peremptory challenge.

"Stephen Earle; the American, you know. I have come to make you a visit."

"Stephen Earle!" Makedónsky's voice betrayed utter astonishment. Slowly he shot back the bolt—the door creaked and opened. . . . Makedónsky's gigantic form, fully dressed in uniform, loomed darkly against a bar of light cast from an inner door.

"To what, may I ask, do I owe the honor of your visit, so late at night—or rather, so early in the morning?" asked Makedónsky, politely enough, but Earle noticed that he gave him no invitation to enter, and made no movement to free the way.

"Mere accident! I happened to be passing by, and I saw your light. . . . Then I remembered that you had once invited me to call on you. . . . So I knocked."

"Ah! But if I am not mistaken, Monsieur Earle," rejoined Makedónsky instantly, "you uttered certain words, at the time of your offering to act for Dr. Malinóffsky, which clearly intimated your disapproval of certain actions of mine for which you considered me at fault."

"That is true, Colonel. I thought, and still think, candidly, that you have done Anatól Borísovich a grave wrong, and that you should give him satisfaction for it. . . . You surely must have understood his furious resentment, his despair."

"I refused," replied Makedónsky dryly. "Why, then, should you come to discuss Dr. Malinóffsky's feelings with me now? It is half over midnight, you know."

"You forget, Colonel, that I said I had come merely as a visitor, acting in good faith, on your own invitation."

"My own invitation? Pardon me, but I do not understand!"

"Have you forgotten, Colonel," said Earle, with the slightest intonation of offense, "that you yourself invited me to call upon you? Do you not recall your invitation? It was on the day of your arrival—in the Park. . . . You said you would give me some idea of life in the Army. . . . As to my coming so late, it is due merely to accident. I could not sleep. I came out for a walk. I passed your villa, saw a light, thought you probably

had not retired—and determined to come in and have a smoke and talk, *à l'Américaine*."

"Oh!" said Makedónsky, smiling somewhat grimly in the half-light. "This is *à l'Américaine*, is it? That explains everything!"

"Precisely!" Earle smiled also, the faintest flicker.

"*Nu!*" Makedónsky stood aside at last, but, as Earle keenly felt, reluctantly. "You must come in. We can chat for a few minutes, at least."

Earle, inwardly exulting, outwardly calm, followed his unwilling host inside. The door closed. Makedónsky did not, however, push the bolt.

5

The apartment into which Earle was ushered was a high and spacious room, luxuriously furnished. . . . It had soft Anatolian and Kirshan rugs upon the floor, white gleams of bric-à-brac and statuettes, soft tapestries, bookcases, a grand piano of gleaming ebony. The walls were hung with a few choice paintings, most of which he recognized; a reproduction of Makóffsky's "Choosing of the Bride"; a battle scene of Vereshchagin; Weyman's "Madonna of the Rosary"; Monna Lisa, with her pale, mysterious smile; the pink loveliness of Phryné; a blue-green study of Sorolla. An oddly heterogeneous collection, determined by the personal caprice of a widely traveled dilettante. On a high pedestal of mottled Ural stone stood beside the piano a large cast of Antokólsky's Mephistopheles . . . a cold, remote, diabolic consciousness replete in every feature, in every lean and knotted muscle . . . which somehow made Earle think of Makedónsky himself!

"Sit down." Makedónsky offered him long, yellow-tubed cigarettes from a massive silver case.

"Will you have a glass of wine?"

"With pleasure."

Earle's eyes were studying the apartment, searching, scrutinizing. The back rooms were screened off by thick and heavy hangings of blue. Not a sound broke the silence of the house.

Makedónsky rose, went to an ebony closet near the piano, opened it and took out two delicate, long-stemmed wine-glasses and a decanter of wine that flashed red as blood in the yellow lamplight; placed them on a Moorish taburet, between his chair and that of his visitor; poured both of the glasses full, his own glass first, according to long traditional Russian custom, going

back centuries when poisoned wine was a thing of no uncommon occurrence, and pushed the other glass over to his guest.

"Drink, Monsieur, and to your health!"

"To yours," rejoined Earle, as they touched glasses.

"Thank you," rejoined Makedónsky. "Incidentally," he added with a smile, and the instinctive vainglory of the man conscious of his physical strength, "you need have no solicitude about my health. It is, and always has been, like iron."

"And that amazes me! How with the life you lead, or which I suppose you lead; the gay, feverish, dissipated life of the army officer—you are not offended——?"

"Not at all. Your adjectives are quite correctly placed."

"Wine and cards and late hours——"

"And the pursuit of *das ewig Weibliche* . . ." supplemented Makedónsky, smiling.

"Exactly—and women, of whom, I dare say, you have known many——"

"Many," confirmed Makedónsky, with a smile.

"How you have kept your health, which, as you say, and as your looks sufficiently demonstrate, is iron——"

"Monsieur," replied Makedónsky, crossing one booted leg over the other, and blowing a long stream of blue smoke into the warm air, watching it as it opened fanlike, whirled and columned itself into a white and vortexed spiral. . . . "You have touched upon a fact which has played a rôle of great importance in my life. Many men have cultivated their body, and this has undoubtedly made them stronger and more vital men than those who have neglected it. But though they developed the muscles of their body, they did not, so to speak, develop the muscles of their soul, by which I mean nothing more nor less than their emotions; and these again depend on the state of equilibrium of the nervous system. And the nervous system is affected by the brain. As we think, so we are. I saw then, while still a young man, that to become perfectly adapted to life and my environment, I must secure a proper attitude toward life, and live rigidly in accordance with it. I began to study men; I thought, I read, I traveled. . . . And life itself crystallized the fundamental nucleus of my system."

"You interest me!" An eagerness gleamed in Earle's eyes. "I am always in search of new theories. Especially philosophies of life. Might I ask—do you mind——?"

"I could sum it up," Makedónsky smiled his sudden illuminating smile . . . "in a single phrase."

"Which is——?"

"*Vsě¹ lekhò dostát!*" (Everything is easy to obtain!) "Money; fame; passion; even love. Therefore all these things are contemptible: the treasures of the soul should not be wasted on them; they are in character purely delusional, tawdry, commonplace. . . . The man who makes of any of these a fetish before which he prostrates his brain, his soul, his genius, is nothing but an abject slave."

"Then life, in your philosophy, is vain?" Earle leaned back, disappointed.

"No!" contradicted Makedónsky, unexpectedly, his cold eyes emitting their incandescent fire. "Life has some things difficult to obtain; things rare and seldom, moments precious and unique."

"What moments are these?"

"Moments which only few can know, for with it goes a temperament. Three kinds of events have brought those moments to me. . . ."

"Three kinds of events?"

"Yes. Do you wish to hear what they are?"

"Very much!"

"Deadly peril. . . . Gambling on enormous stakes. . . . The taking of a woman from a rival, at the price of the rival's life. . . ."

Earle gazed aghast at the man who formulated such a monstrous code of pleasure. . . . Makedónsky burst out laughing. . . .

"You seem perturbed! I told you that mine is a theory which could be held by few."

"I object to the taking of human life," replied Earle gravely. "The other two things I understand."

"There is," remarked Makedónsky nonchalantly, as he sipped his wine, "a fierce, delightful pleasure in sending a bullet crashing through the brain of a man who disputes our possession of a woman's favor. . . ."

"Not to me!"

"I will not insist on it," returned Makedónsky, but his smile now was grim. "You do not understand our Slavic psychology, Monsieur Earle. We are still half barbarians. The old Tartar is in us—the spirit of Attila and Genghis-khan."

"But I should like to know——" began Earle, knitting his brows (he had almost forgotten the real object of his visit).

¹ Pronounced fsiò.

"And I should like to know," came suddenly a clear, vibrant voice from behind the American, "when you two men are ever going to finish this interminable conversation?"

Earle turned, startled—and then leaped swiftly to his feet. Makedónsky remained quite unmoved.

6

Framed in the blue hangings stood Liúba Yermoláeva. Her golden hair shone like an aureole; her turquoise eyes were brilliant with anger, visible also in the scarlet flush on the otherwise pale cheeks.

"I wondered how long you would stand it," remarked Makedónsky, almost with amusement, his eyes fixed calmly on her angry face.

"And well you might wonder!" cried Liúba furiously, stamping her foot. "Did you think I would stay in that stuffy room all night?"

"But your reputation, my dear girl!" admonished Makedónsky, with polished irony.

Liúba stamped her foot again.

"My reputation! In the first place" (she shot an oblique glance at Earle) "I have been here only a few moments——" (Makedónsky's lips twitched, but Earle, whose gaze was fixed on Liúba, did not see.) "Secondly" (she continued), "Monsieur Earle is a friend of mine, who would never think evil of me, would you, my American?"

She turned on him forthwith the jeweled luster of her eyes, the sudden radiance of her flashing smile.

Earle bowed silently, his gaze fixed upon her.

"*Nu*, now that you have appeared like a *dea ex machina*," said Makedónsky with his polished, subtle accents, "perhaps you will finish the glass of wine that you were drinking when M. Earle called."

"With pleasure!" assented Liúba gaily, throwing herself into the carved Italian chair, whose griffin leered at Earle with a sardonic smile.

Makedónsky rose, went to the wine chest, and took out a third glass still half filled with wine.

Liúba accepted it gracefully, and put it to her lips.

"Drink, Monsieur Earle!" Makedónsky lifted his own glass high. "I pledge you, '*Zhénshchini*'" ¹

¹ Women.

Earle, who had resumed his seat, lifted his glass. He had regained control of his emotions.

"I pledge you the same, in paraphrase——" he echoed, gazing at the wine's deep crimson glow. "*Fragility!*"

"*Fu!* Stepán!" cried Liúba, her violet eyes flashing, as Makedónsky laughed, and cast at Earle a penetrating glance. "How ungallant! I shall refuse to drink to it."

"Pledge us yourself," Makedónsky suggested.

"Good," replied Liúba with satisfaction, lifting her gleaming glass. "I pledge you, thus: 'Life and Youth and Pleasure—and the art of taking them all lightly, as they deserve!'"

"Good!" approved Makedónsky. "That is a toast with the sentiment of which I am in complete accord. Will you drink to that, Monsieur Earle?"

"Yes." Earle raised his glass, casting at Liúba a cold glance, of the quality of which she feigned unconsciousness. "I will drink to that."

So the three drank to Liúba's toast. Makedónsky and Liúba drained their glasses, but Earle scarcely wet his lips.

"Now," Liúba placed her glass on the taburet. "I want two things——"

"Command!" encouraged Makedónsky.

"First, a cigarette—*merci!* Secondly——"

She paused—gazing at Earle obliquely as if gauging the effect of her request.

"Secondly——?"

"Secondly—that before we leave—you are going to see me home, Stepán Geórgievich, truth?—Colonel Makedónsky will play for us on his piano. I have heard that you are a wonderful performer, Colonel. Is it true?"

"Tolerable!" Makedónsky rose and went to the piano. "What kind of music do you want?"

"Something of your own!"

Makedónsky smiled, turned, struck a few crisp chords with the precision and technique of a master, then paused abruptly, and began to weave a dreamy harmony, full of rich minors and chromatics. . . .

To Earle it seemed that on a shimmering ladder of minor arpeggios, some young and passionate spirit rose, mounted up on eager feet to a light-resplendent plain. Here Life lured and beckoned: the sky shone like a gleaming jewel of lapis lazuli; the sun sent over all a tenuous golden dust; the landscape was jade and emerald; red poppies burned in the golden grain like

crimson stars; through daisied meadows where thickly growing beds of flowers ran like bright waves of fire, flowed purling brooks; and under the blue sky the sunlit air quivered and throbbed with the expectation of some great event, the unfolding of some anticipated mystery. This theme of expectation lingered, and slowly merged into the leitmotif chromatic; again the rippling joy, the gushing streams, the sapphire sky, the jade and emerald landscape, strangely shimmering. Now, loud, confident, exulting, a pæan rose; a crash of pealing chords told the final triumph, and all the Joy of Life came pouring down in glittering, golden rain.

"Magnificent!" cried Liúba, clapping her hands, as the last notes died away. "It was wonderful! You play with such a mastery! What was it?"

"My own composition." Makedónsky did not even glance at her. "A theme in a piece of Veniáfsky gave me a suggestion for it."

"It is beautiful," Liúba declared.

"It was meant for you. And this is for Monsieur Earle."

Earle had the sensation of a velvety blackness, starred by yellow candle-lights, amidst which solemn voices chanted. The spirit of Yearning rose and journeyed forth upon a Quest for something vast and profound. Consummation came; part, but not all of the yearning; and some passion of lyrical sorrow burst its bounds, and poured itself forth in sheets of snow-white flame. Soft, flute-like, an exquisite harmony arose, lived for a moment, and died: then came again the dark and tragic requiem, grief and poignant bitterness, the sting and sweet of Memory. The dream again; strange notes of yearning—silence——

"What does it mean?" inquired Liúba.

"Don't ask me what it means," rejoined Makedónsky briefly, as he arose. "That's a thing I can't endure. Every one reads into Music his own experiences, his own emotions."

"So you don't believe that a musician must himself have experienced the emotions that he produces?" queried Earle, outwardly calm, though his face was somber.

"Experience? No!" Makedónsky rejoined, standing before them. "But he must *understand* them. Now I have known—shall we take two of the most universal human emotions?—neither Love nor Sorrow, yet I understand perfectly their nature and their effect."

"Never experienced Love?" exclaimed Liúba with mock horror. "It is high time that your education should commence!"

"No education could help me," Makedónsky smiled, but with a certain gravity. "I was telling you, M. Earle, how I evolved my System. But I also told you that it went with a certain temperament—I was, to use a popular expression, born without a heart!"

"I pity you," said Liúba. "At least, as far as the Love is concerned."

"I envy you," said Earle.

"I am not sure if I envy myself," replied Makedónsky.

"Have you regretted it?"

"At times. Especially as a young man. . . . I was like the boy in one of Vágner's 'Tales of the Purring Cat.' . . . It was about a beautiful boy who had received from the good fairies every grace, every gift and accomplishment. But the last fairy, who loved him best of all, took out the boy's heart and put in its place a pink, heart-shaped piece of marble.

"The boy grew up, beautiful as the day, was fêted, admired, flattered; all loved and admired him—he cared for nothing and nobody. Beautiful women loved him: one killed herself for his sake; his parents died, and nothing moved him; and he was sad because he understood that nothing moved him; and he longed for love, not to receive, but to give. . . .

"I read that tale as a boy, and I have always remembered it."

"And what happened to him?" questioned Liúba. "Did he die?"

"I have forgotten the end. Something tragic, I believe. Will you have another glass of wine before you go, M. Earle?"

"Thank you, no. . . ."

"But wait!" cried Liúba, as Earle took up his hat and bowed to her coldly. "Do you mean to say that you intend to leave me here?"

"Why not?" he asked coolly. "You were here when I came."

"Yes. But now it is different. Wait, please, till I get my things. . . ."

Liúba turned, thereupon, and ran into the inner room.

7

The two men turned and looked at one another.

"I trust to your honor, of course, not to mention to any one the fact of Madame Babróva's presence here to-night," said Makedónsky curtly.

"You need have no fear," rejoined Earle bitterly.

Makedónsky caught the inflection; he came over to Earle, and, laying one hand upon his shoulder, looked down from his greater height into the American's face.

"Listen, Earle," he said. "Have I been encroaching on your—privileges?"

"Perhaps." Earle gazed intently, but without hatred, into the strong and beautiful face.

"Then let me say that I am deeply sorry. Even though you have no serious ground for complaint. Do you feel animosity to me?"

"No. None. I hardly know why I have none. . . . I suppose I should have. I was hostile to you before I came."

"And now?"

"I admire you. I like you. I cannot help liking you."

White flame flashed into Makedónsky's eyes.

"Listen, Earle," he said. "I have been prating and theorizing about my lack of heart all the evening. You will think me inconsistent when I tell you—this admission from your lips is pleasing to me. Many women have liked me, but few men. And you will perhaps think me mad, judging from your Anglo-Saxon standards—remember that I am a Russian,—when I tell you that I should like to embrace you, as a comrade, as a brother, as a friend."

And suddenly Makedónsky leaned over, put both hands on Earle's shoulders and embraced him heartily and sincerely. Earle returned the embrace with real emotion. The two men had sworn a pact by an ancient rite, and both Makedónsky and Stephen Earle henceforth had a friend.

8

"*Nu*, when you two incomprehensible imbeciles have got through embracing one another," came the hard and silvery voice again from the hangings, "I will ask Monsieur Earle to take me home."

The two men stood apart; and each unconsciously cast a hostile glance at the beautiful female creature who stood before them, her blond head covered with a silken scarf, a blue cloak thrown gracefully over her shoulders; a hostility which she perceived (for Liúba was intelligent), but would not notice. Chattering gayly, she gave Makedónsky her hand, which he kissed conventionally, and led the way to the door.

"Au revoir!" she called, over her shoulder, to Makedónsky, who came behind Earle.

"Adieu!" His voice held a touch of coldness.

Earle turned—put out his hand—Makedónsky grasped and pressed it warmly.

"A quiet night!" said Earle.

"A quiet night, my friend!" responded Makedónsky cordially.

The door closed behind them; the eyes of heaven had opened; they were out under a vast, velvety, starlit sky.

CHAPTER XIV

I

SILENTLY they walked together side by side around the house and out over the steppe, gaining soon the path leading to the Vermoláeff villas.

"What time is it, Stepán?"

Earle took his watch from his pocket, struck a match, and looked at the dial. Liúba gazed intently at his face as the match flamed up: it was impassive.

"It is one o'clock," he answered curtly, as the match went out.

"Late!" commented Liúba. "You and Colonel Makedónsky are certainly great talkers. I really believe that if I had not come out as I did, you would have talked all night."

"Very likely!"

"You must not think, Stepán," said Liúba sweetly, "that I have done anything which you would not have liked. . . . My visit to Colonel Makedónsky was really nothing but a silly prank. He wagered me a week ago that I would not dare to call upon him at his own villa, and I accepted the challenge."

Hatred suddenly swept him as he realized her hypocrisy.

"You consider a midnight visit to the apartments of a Russian officer, a man noted for his *affaires du cœur*, as a mere silly prank?" he asked, in a hard voice. "Perhaps, were it known, it might be characterized differently."

"Many things might incur blame and reproach if they were known," she retorted. "For instance, our own relations."

"And if people blamed us, they would blame us justly——"

He stopped short, wordless, as he caught the mockery of her hard and silvery laughter.

"Really, *Monsieur l'Américain*, you are too naïf!"

He turned upon her furiously.

"And you too cynical! At least, too cynical for me!"

"Indeed!" she retorted, mockingly.

"When I first met you," went on Earle hoarsely, "I saw that you were beautiful, as beautiful as an angel; and in your face

was a strange sweetness, in your updrawn brows, in your mouth, your smile——”

“*Bózhè mói!*” she interrupted impatiently, as they crossed over to enter the broad, grassy avenue leading to the Yermoláeff villas. “You are really too *exalté* for me! I am weary of all this poetic idealization, all this transcendental mysticism—wearied to death of it!”

“Yes,” flung out Earle bitterly. “You prefer to be loved for your body!”

Liúba turned on him furiously as they reached her villa.

“How *dare* you say such a thing to me? How dare you? How dare you?”

She suddenly broke away from him, and ran up the steps, rapped sharply at the heavy oaken door, which a moment later was opened by her maid. . . .

“A quiet night to you, at least!” called Earle, in a trembling voice, from below.

“*Proshcháyè!*” (Farewell), she threw back, in a hard and icy voice, as she ran in.

The big door slammed behind her.

A wild and furious barking began behind the villa.

2

Slowly, with bowed head, Earle made his way back to his own villa.

This, then, was the event for which Mária Aleksiévna had awakened him. How far away it seemed, that strange awakening; that wild, fantastic course over the nocturnal steppe; that visit to Makedónsky's house; that unexpected encountering of Liúba; the pledge of friendship with Makedónsky; the midnight, homeward way! And now this misunderstanding, quarrel. . . .

Well, he would break with Liúba. . . . Their brief span of love was at an end. It had always been like that——

In the palpitating darkness of his little room, he lay on his narrow bed, with burning eyes and fevered brain, and thought. Red flowers—red flowers of suffering——

He was stifling. He rose and opened the window wider.

Outside it was very still. The dogs had long ago ceased barking. The cool night air, as it blew against his throbbing temples, was grateful. Silence. . . . Only the low and rhythmic rustle of the tall poplars in the *dvor*. . . .

A twinkling light flickered through the foliage. . . . That must be from Liúba's villa.

He could not stay in his rooms.

3

Out again under the cold remoteness of the heavens, where millions of white stars gleamed.

Russian stars. . . .

On his way back to the steppe he passed again before Liúba's villa. It seemed to him that there was a fluttering of white before her door.

"Liúba?" he thought, and his heart leaped treacherously up within him. And what if it were Liúba? Had he no pride?

He did not pause at the foot of the double stairway which led up to that faintly luminous patch which might have been a woman's dress, but went on swiftly.

Yet he could not pretend not to hear the little cry that followed him.

"Stepán! Is that you?"

"Yes."

"Don't go away," murmured Liúba softly. "Come up here. I want to talk to you."

"To what purpose?"

"Come, Stepán," she said coaxingly, and the musical voice was honey-sweet. "I am unhappy. I want to talk to thee!"

Slowly he went up the steps, and stood, motionless and silent, before her.

She took both his hands in hers, and drew him down beside her on the broad threshold of the shadowed door. Leaned her golden head upon his shoulder; drew his arm around her waist. And both were mute. Far off on the vast and boundless steppe the stridulous crickets beat their vibrant drums; the trees rustled gently, with a sigh that was like a caress; the stars twinkled and glowed, white silver on a dark blue field; the warm air, heavy with the penetrating sweetness of the dew-swept gardens, was very still.

She turned her face to him. . . .

"Stepán!—I am so sorry. Forgive me!"

Earle turned his face and gazed deep into her eyes, which burned in the shadow like two strangely glowing gems; gazed at the beautiful face; at the rippling waves of her unfastened hair, full of sweet fragrances.

"Stepán," she said again, coaxingly. "Say you forgive me. You know I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I swear that there was nothing wrong between Makedónsky and me; he did not even kiss me!"

"I forgive,—and love you."

The jeweled eyes flashed luminously in the darkness.

"Stepán! I love you, too. I love you to-night more than I ever loved you before!"

And she put her warm, velvet-soft cheek against his cheek, and then she drew his face to hers, and their lips met in a long kiss.

She suddenly drew back and rose.

"I must go in," she said in an unsteady voice.

"So soon?" said Earle, dreamily.

"Soon? Do you not know that it is almost two o'clock in the morning?"

"Two? What do I care if it is two—or three—or any time? I know no time when I am with thee. There is no time, no world, when thou art by my side. There is only thou—thou—thou——"

She leaned to him, wound her arms about his neck. Beneath the thin stuff of her peignoir he could feel the pressure of her full, firm breasts.

"My poet! My romantic boy! Thou must not believe a thing I said this evening. It is for that I loved thee, for that that I am proud to have thy love——"

"Liúba!"

"I must go in. It is late. Let me go," she murmured.

"Thou didst not say that once."

"I was mad. And thou, I am sure, didst despise me afterward. To-night I bid thee go."

"To-night I will not go. I am thine—both soul and body. I am happy. I care for nothing else."

"Thou wilt despise me afterward."

"No."

4

With arms intertwined they entered.

A servant maid lay asleep upon the narrow pallet across the way.

"Aksínia!" called Liúba imperiously. She stood there in the raw, yellow lamplight, tall in her long-trained, clinging peignoir of blue, her golden hair cascading upon her shoulders.

The maid started up, wild-eyed, from sleep.

"Yes, mistress."

"Lock and bolt the door, and put out the lamp. This gentleman stays here to-night."

"Yes, mistress; yes, mistress," stammered the maid, stupidly.

Earle turned his head and gazed at Liúba. Like some royal Meretrix she stood there, proud, triumphant, unashamed.

"And, Aksínia, see that to-morrow I am not disturbed."

"I obey, mistress!"

Liúba turned to Earle.

"Come, Stepán!"

Her own room, dimly lit by the yellow flame of a candle; the heavy curtains drawn.

She faced him in the wan light, bringing him the poignant sweetness of her loveliness, as she gazed at him with delicate, updrawn brows, smiling at him. . . .

"Have I seduced thee, Stepán?"

As he took her in his arms, her hand stole forth, groping for the candle.

The light suddenly went out.

CHAPTER XV

I

IT is time for thee to go, my soul," said Liúba, stifling an unmistakable yawn, as she leaned her disheveled golden head upon his shoulder.

Earle, who stood by the window, raised the heavy curtain and gazed out into a richly colored and exquisite dawn. . . . The long javelins of the rising sun cast gleaming mirages across the polished floor; and rosy shafts struck full upon the white, bare arm, on which the golden head was sleepily propped, and part of a naked shoulder.

"I will see thee out." Her bare feet made a soft pit-a-pat upon the floor.

He took his hat and stick from the little lacquered table; hand in hand they went out through the hall.

The girl, lying on her pallet near the door, leapt up as they approached.

"This minute, *bárin*, this minute," she murmured, hastening ahead of them officiously to the door, and fumbling with bolt and lock.

At the door Earle turned.

"Farewell!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Tell me, Stepán—" Liúba gazed up at him, heavy-eyed; her pale face, with its turquoise, shadowed gaze, unutterably alluring—"thou despisest me not, say?"

"Despise thee? I adore thee!"

"And I thee. *Do svidónia!*"

"*Do svidónia!*"

They exchanged a last kiss.

The maid pushed open the big, creaking door. Earle stepped out.

And found himself face to face with Prince Tatárinoff, who stood dumfounded, a small valise of English leather in one hand, as though he had just returned from a journey, in the other,

a large iron key, which, obviously, he had just been on the point of inserting in the lock.

Earle heard a suppressed exclamation behind him—the door closed quickly.

2

He stood stupefied, taken aback, before the Prince, who, himself astonished, stared at him open-mouthed. . . . In a moment, however, the surprise passed from his face, which became dark and ominous.

"So! You pay early visits, Monsieur Earle."

"Yes. So, apparently, do you!" Earle, still amazed, glanced at the key in the Prince's hand.

"Perhaps I do," answered the Prince tensely; "and perhaps I have a right to do so!"

"Indeed! My congratulations! I was not aware that Madame Babróva had been 'crowned'¹ with you!"

"Monsieur Earle," exclaimed Prince Tatárinoff fiercely, "this is no time for frivolous repartie. . . . Plain words are needed here, and I shall speak them. . . . The woman who resides in this villa is more my wife than the wife of the man whom the law calls her husband. . . . For twelve years—since the first year of her marriage, in fact—her life has been linked with mine. Wherever she went, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Vienna, the Crimea, I have gone with her, paid her expenses lavishly, squandered fortunes on her toilets. In these twelve years I have gained rights which no man can infringe with impunity. I suspected something was going on between you and Madame Babróva; but when I charged her with it, she told me such a story of your virtues and mystical dispositions—mocking you, in fact—that my suspicions were allayed. It seems now that they were only too well justified. . . . But you will pay for it dearly, be sure of that!"

"She laughed, did she?"

"Laughed you to scorn! . . . Now, it seems, we both have the same mistress! . . ."

Some transformation had suddenly come over Tatárinoff: Earle could scarcely recognize him. His slanting eyes had become mere slits, in which some Asiatic fury gleamed; his bearded

¹A reference to the marriage ceremony of the Greek Orthodox Church.

lips were twisted upward like the fangs of a snarling beast: he looked like a Mongol tribesman of the East, swept by strange flames of hatred and fanaticism. . . . Earle suddenly remembered Makedónsky's words of the night before. In a single second this Russian nobleman seemed to have reverted from a polished, urbane gentleman to the type of some far, long-buried ancestor. . . . Earle looked at him in amazement: he had never seen so sudden and so complete a transformation. Bodily, before his eyes, an evil spirit had risen.

"That being the case," Earle said, in a tone in which contempt vibrated, "you are welcome to her!"

"Ah, I am welcome to her! . . ." Tatárinoff cast at the tall, strong figure, at the fair hair and skin of his successful rival a baleful glare, glowing with insane hatred, as fierce and ruthless as a tiger's. "I am welcome to her . . . am I? I thank you . . . thank you for nothing. I am welcome. . . . Yes, but *you* are not welcome! You have had what is mine, mine, I tell you, *mine!* . . ."

His voice rose to a shriek, foam came to his lips, and his tawny eyes grew bloodshot. Without another word, he suddenly threw himself upon the American, struck him savagely in the face again and again, then seized him by the throat, and tried with every ounce of strength which he possessed to strangle him with his bare hands.

Earle, taken by surprise, reeled, and almost fell. In a moment's space, however, he recovered his balance. And an answering flame of hatred swept through him; the old primitive lust of battle leaped out upon the surface; he saw red. With a violent jerk he pulled Tatárinoff's bony hands away from his throat; dealt the dark, Chinese-like mask, distorted with grinning hatred, a blow that sent the Prince reeling against the balustrade. . . . There he swayed back and forth a moment, his long legs half-bent and limp, like one about to fall, one arm clinging to a post. . . . Stern and silent Earle stood and gazed at him, waiting. . . .

Slowly the sagging figure straightened up: the closed eyes opened their slanting lids, the tawny fury blazed again. Without a word, he gathered himself together, and sprang again on Earle like a leaping tiger. Earle stepped forward with fierce, clenched fists. His eyes held the glint of steel. Out right, out left, with crashing blows, the second of which lifted the Prince completely off his feet and crumpled him up in a heap on the floor of the balcony.

And again Earle waited, but the love of battle had gone out of him. . . . It seemed a long time before Tatárinoff finally dragged himself to his feet, and with bleeding mouth and nerveless legs sought to attack him again.

"Don't be a fool, Tatárinoff!" cried Earle, pushing the distorted face away with his hands. "Don't be a fool. Don't you see that you're no match for me? Give it up. I could kill you if I really wanted to. Go away, and don't force me. . . ."

"Not till I have your life!" Tatárinoff's voice came with a hoarse, hissing sound through his blood-stained lips, as he strove again and again to reach the hated face of his opponent. But the strong arms held his wrists in a grip of iron.

"You've got the spirit, but you haven't the strength!" said Earle. "Give it up. Go away. Don't try my patience too far; I'm not in a good mood."

Judging by the relaxing of Tatárinoff's body that he had been convinced, he suddenly pushed him off, none too gently. Tatárinoff reeled against the balustrade, which his hands gripped convulsively. But the tawny fires still gleamed, the bloody lips still sneered in their bestial fury.

"You big English beast! You think you can do this to me . . . to *me*, Tatárinoff?"

Slowly one hand stole behind him . . . swiftly it came back. . . . A silvery gleam. . . . A scarlet flame, a reverberating crash which hurled itself like a thunderbolt upon the American's broad breast, left him writhing and tottering in blind agony, crumpled him up over the balustrade, from which he sank slowly, by a series of strange, convulsive jerks, to the balcony floor, where he lay, oddly quiet, upon his face, with arms stretched wide.

The door flew open. On the threshold stood Liúba Yermoláeva, still in her night robe, her golden hair falling about her pale face in a disordered flood.

"What have you done, Prince?" she cried, in a strident voice. "You have killed him. On the balcony of my villa. Are you insane . . . ?"

"Go back!" grated the Prince, his dark face working. . . . "Go back, or I'll shoot you, too. You, at least, deserve it . . . you Jezabel, you prostitute! . . . I might have known that the daughter of Evgénia Yermoláevna—— Your key . . . take back your key!"

A vindictive light flashed into his tawny eyes: with a violent gesture he threw the heavy iron key into her face. It

fell with a metallic reverberation upon the wooden floor. Quickly the Prince turned on his heel and left the villa, without a backward glance.

With a furious exclamation, Liúba turned to the round-eyed, terrified servant maid who peered out behind her.

"Aksínia!" she cried. "Go for a Doctor! Dr. Malinóffsky . . . he's the nearest. Tell him that the American shot himself upon my balcony. Have him taken away!"

Swiftly she ran into the house and slammed the big door fiercely behind her.

Stumbling and weeping, Aksínia ran down the steps, and vanished in the courtyard of the Yermoláeff villas.

3

The family did not tell Eléna the news until after breakfast. Earle, with a bullet in his lung, had been transported across the grassy square to his own villa. A nurse was attending him. The servant maid of Liúba Yermoláeva had said that Earle had shot himself upon Liúba's balcony. Startled by the shot, they had come out and found him. His revolver lay beside him—one chamber discharged—when Dr. Malinóffsky arrived. Liúba was invisible.

"Oh, Papa!" Horrified, Eléna gazed at her father as he sat, grim and imperturbable, at his desk. "Oh, Papa! Will he die?" Her voice sank almost to a whisper.

"I don't know. Perhaps. He has a dangerous wound."

Eléna suddenly began to weep.

"Oh, Papa . . . I . . . I'm so sorry for him. . . . Oh, poor boy . . . to come so far, for such an end!"

"Why did he make love to Liúba?" demanded Ekaterína, her blue eyes shining severely through her big spectacles. "Why didn't he keep away from her? Any one could see that she was *entretenu*, with all her style of life, and fine toilets, and the Prince always following in her train."

Eléna turned to her mother a glance, in which resentment, and protection, and sorrow all met and mingled. Then, without another word, she turned and left the study.

"What's the matter with the girl?" cried Ekaterína, with tremulous anger.

"They were friends," replied her husband, curtly.

"Oh, blind, blind! All of you . . . all of you!" retorted

Ekaterína, as she seized her packet of cigarettes and left the room.

"Accursed women! . . . Fools!" Dr. Malinóffsky barked after her with sudden anger, as he threw open a big volume on therapeutics, and set himself grimly to work upon his editing.

CHAPTER XVI

I

IT was morning again.

Eléna had just awakened. After a sleepless night she had finally fallen asleep toward dawn. She awoke all of a-tremble, and sat up in bed, wild-eyed, her hand clutching at her breast. She had had a horrible nightmare, in which it had seemed to her that they had brought Tóssia to her, dead. She wiped away the tears that were still streaming down her face.

The dream had made a powerful impression upon her; it had been so vivid. She could still see Tóssia's face, with its closed eyes and marble pallor. . . .

The idea haunted her. This dream had been sent to her as a warning of the future. . . . She sat there, feeling the horror grow as she thought of Tóssia and of Makedónsky.

Why shouldn't it happen? Who knew what Tóssia would try to do, if he were dismissed from the army? They would try to arrest him, and he would resist. He would never give up his uniform. Perhaps he would be shot in a duel with Makedónsky.

It was then, quite simply and calmly, that she decided to go to Makedónsky and beg him, herself, to relent, to intercede for her brother.

Eleven o'clock. Makedónsky, like most of the *dúchniki*, would be at this hour in the Park.

The Park—the eternal Park! How she had grown to loathe it this summer, with all its heterogeneous motley of races and individualities, its ubiquitous tittle-tattle and scandal-mongering; its atmosphere of flirtation and sex!

Sex! She hated that, too. It was this that had brought down upon her brother's head his doom; it was this that was responsible for Stephen Earle's lying at death's door.

And she herself—and Makedónsky. . . .

Oblivious to logic, she dressed very carefully. A woman's attire is, to her, what a weapon is to a man. . . .

2

So, like Nadiézhda before her, she went forth to assail the dragon, perhaps as fruitlessly. She would at least have made the effort. . . . Naddi had been right. Anatól was her brother. What would she feel if they brought *him* home like Stephen Earle, limp and inanimate? What bitterness! What remorse!

At the Park she met immediately people whom she knew. . . . The School Inspector . . . Klara Petróvna . . . Volódia Yermoláeff. . . .

But on these she had no attention to bestow. For at the end of the Promenade her quick eye had already perceived Makedónsky, surrounded, as usual, by his satellites, junkers, Colonels, Generals.

Suddenly she came face to face with Vera and Nadiézhda. They were walking with Sóltseff, a rich chemist, who was now Vera's official *poklónnik*.¹ Nadiézhda was obviously profoundly bored by the chemist's fatuities, which were not even intended to be appreciated by her. She looked capricious and depressed.

Eléna's heart smote her. Nadiézhda, a girl of another family, had shown herself more devoted to Tóssia than Eléna herself. . . . His own sister. . . . A gladness came to her that she had at last found herself able to go to Makedónsky.

"Naddi!"

Nadiézhda put up her lorgnette.

"Eléna!" With obvious gladness she abandoned her sister and Monsieur Sóltseff on the spot, and almost rushed into Eléna's arms.

"Elénokha! I am so glad you came down to the Park! . . . I am frightfully troubled over Tóssia, you know. Especially since I heard about poor Stepán Géorgevich."

"I have come to the Park to speak with Makedónsky, Naddi," was Eléna's sole reply. She pressed Nadiézhda's arm warmly.

Nadiézhda's dark eyes gleamed.

"Oh, Eléna! Really?"

"Really!"

"Eléna, I am so glad! . . . Somehow, I have always thought—and hoped—you would. . . . I have a feeling that if there is any hope at all, it will come through you. . . . He is here now, you know."

"*Vidielal*!"² Naddi, help me! Walk with me to the end of

¹Adorer.

²I saw (him).

the promenade and tell Makedónsky that I wish to speak with him—privately. I will sit on this empty bench, waiting. . . .”

3

“You wished to speak to me, Eléna Borísovna?”

It was a new Makedónsky who spoke to her—a grave and gentle Makedónsky.

“Yes, Maksím Antónich. I wish to speak with you. Do you mind sitting here with me for a few moments?”

“With pleasure!”

His sword clanked as he sat down; he placed it between his knees, and bent on her an odd and searching glance.

“Maksím Antónich, have you heard about poor Stephen Earle?”

“About his attempt at suicide? Yes. All Slaviánsk is discussing it like mad. Just imagine! He was at my villa only the night before!”

“At your villa?” Eléna repeated in surprise. “But I thought—I supposed——”

“That we were on bad terms? We were, until he came to see me. Don’t ask me the circumstances, for I can’t tell you. That night, Eléna Borísovna, Stephen Earle and I swore eternal friendship. I never dreamed that he would shoot himself the very next morning. This affair with Madame Babróva seems to have hit him very hard.”

“He was madly in love with her.”

“Fascinated—you mean!” Makedónsky commented scornfully. “A man like Stephen Earle could never love a woman like Liúba Yermoláeva, if he knew her true character!”

“I don’t know certainly, of course, but I imagine he must have discovered—and the shock——”

“About her relations with Tatárinoff? I presume so. Madame Babróva has a genius for intrigue, but truth will out. But tell me—did he express any thought of self-destruction during the time that you have known him?”

“No—none! He had his sadnesses and melancholies. But he is not the kind of a man who commits suicide. He must have had some terrible mental shock . . . And even then . . .

“I suspect you are right. And I believe he shot himself after a final quarrel with Liúba Yermoláeva.”

“Do you think so?” asked Eléna thoughtfully.

“That, at least, is my opinion. Something, evidently, hap-

pened between them that morning. What, of course, we do not know."

"It is strange," rejoined Eléna.

Silence fell.

"Maksím Antónich," began Eléna again, more boldly, for she had now had time to become accustomed to talking with Makedónsky. "I, of course, am filled with sorrow over this disaster to Stephen Earle! He was my friend—I say it proudly."

"You *may* be proud!" declared Makedónsky, his eyes suddenly blazing forth their strange white fire.

"I am glad you say so. . . . I wish to say that if he does not recover, I shall never forget him; all my life I shall remember him, and prize the friendship that he bestowed on me."

"But it was not for that that I called you to speak with me, Maksím Antónich," she went on bravely, turning on him her gray and earnest glance. "You must not take it ill of me. All this time I have held aloof. I did not feel it delicate—perhaps you will understand—"

"You refer to your brother, Eléna Borísovna?" asked Makedónsky quietly. Eléna took heart; he was not even angry.

"About my brother, yes. Oh, Maksím Antónich, I am so grieved over him!"

"Eléna Borísovna," began Makedónsky. "A few days ago I was in a different mood from now. Now—I think your friend, *our* friend, Stephen Earle, has worked some miracle. . . . Who knows, perhaps I have discovered that I have a soul—"

Joy leaped into Eléna's heart. "You will not pursue my brother further?"

"No! And it was barely time. To-morrow. . . . I will break off proceedings at once. He has injured me, but I think he has been sufficiently punished. Listen, Eléna Borísovna, for your sake, and for the sake of our poor friend, Stephen Earle, I will go even further. . . . I will have your brother reinstated!"

Eléna turned and faced him, her pale cheeks suddenly suffused with rich carmine, her ardent gaze blazing with gratitude.

"Oh, Maksím Antónich—you have made me so happy!"

Impulsively she put out both her hands to him. He took them gently, and the sweetness of his smile was like a revelation.

"They said you had no heart, Maksím Antónich!" she exclaimed, proudly and scornfully. "That you were ruthless and inhuman. Now I shall prove to them that I was always right, when I said to them that you were merely big, and not inhuman!"

"So you have defended me, little Eléna?" Makedónsky's voice was almost caressing, as he pressed her throbbing hands in his.

"Often! For you, Maksím Antónich, I have suffered," declared Eléna proudly. . . . "I have nearly lost two friends, and many have thought evil of me. Now I know that it was all worth while."

"Dear little Eléna," said Makedónsky, smiling his strange smile, which had now an unwonted sadness. "If I had only met you before——"

"But you did meet me before—and why should you regret? Have you not discovered now that you have a soul?" Eléna spoke half in jest, half in earnest.

"Do you realize how I have lived?" asked Makedónsky, with a kind of grave simplicity.

"Perhaps I can imagine."

"No. You cannot imagine!" contradicted Makedónsky imperiously. "I have been in every respect the monster that I have been depicted. Perhaps, if I had met some one like you, whom I respected and cared for, and who cared for me, I might have been different. But I doubt it!" he added abruptly. "I had in my brain a wildness. Even as a boy. I cared for others not at all. Whenever I had an impulse of kindness, sympathy, pity, I killed it systematically. I considered it weakness. Even now, when I consent to let your brother go, I despise myself, I think——"

"I could teach you to listen to your better self." Her head was bent low; a slight flush crimsoned her oval cheek.

Makedónsky put one hand on hers.

"Do you think you could? Do you think you could put a human heart into the body of a wolf?"

"Oh!" she protested. "You are not a wolf!"

Makedónsky fixed on her his bright, magnetic gaze. "If I were so cruel and inhuman as to ask you to marry me, you would bitterly repent the day of your consent."

"Would I?" asked Eléna in a low voice. "Perhaps I would. Who knows? I will be frank with you, Maksím Antónich, I do not even know if I love you. I admit that you attract me. I am not sure if your influence over me is good."

"Do you think I do not know that our souls are different? You are good. I am evil. You are normal. I am filled with some prenatal madness. You must mate with people of sensibility. I with people like myself: fashionable and corrupt mondaines,

actresses and others of that kind, who have, as people say, no soul. Let the humans dwell in their warm and quiet houses in the valley; let the wolves look down, grim and ruthless, from the snow-topped hills."

He rose, and kissed her hand.

"I am very good to you, little Eléna," he said, as he gazed at her. "I have never come so near to being human before. Do not thank me for it; it is a tribute to something in you—some rare quality—you produce some mysterious vibration . . . Stephen Earle, too—*Nu*, farewell!"

"Farewell?" repeated Eléna, rising slowly.

"Yes, farewell. I wish to flee from temptation, *zndetè!*"¹ His smile flashed, and died away.

"Good-by then, Maksím Antónich," replied Eléna steadfastly. "If it is to be good-by. You, I am sure, know best. I believe I am a Fatalist. God bless you for forgiving my brother, and consenting of your own accord to reinstate him in the Army. I shall always remember you, Maksím Antónich, as a man bigger than other men; as a man strangely powerful, with a flash of divine fire in his soul, which he would not allow to burn; as a man who—as one whom—(her gray eyes fell) as a man whom, perhaps, I could have loved."

"Dear little Eléna! (Makedónsky's deep voice was almost tender.) "I love you, child. But remember my warning——" He broke off abruptly, rose. "Well, I am off to Petersburg to-night. If we ever meet again, remember my warning. . . . And now good-by!"

Eléna rose and gave him her hand; their eyes met in a long glance.

He pressed her hand strongly, touched the visor of his military cap, bowed, turned on his heel and departed. And the whole Park gazed from afar, gossiped, scandal-monged and fluttered.

4

"He refused?"

Eléna looked up quickly. Nadiézhda stood before her, darkly flushed and apprehensive.

"No, he consented."

"Eléna! He *didn't!*" cried Nadiézhda joyfully.

"Did I not tell you that he had a soul?" Eléna's face, grave and thoughtful, bore no expression of triumphant pride. "Not

¹ You know.

only has he consented not to pursue Tóssia further; he has promised even to have him reinstated in the Army."

"You must be a witch!" exclaimed Nadiézhda, almost with awe.

"He loves me," replied Eléna quietly.

"Did he tell you so?" Nadiézhda asked curiously.

"Yes."

"Eléna! You are not going to marry him?"

"No. He is going away. He will not marry me for fear that I will be unhappy."

"He is right!" Nadiézhda spoke with conviction. "I would not like to see you become his wife."

"Would you not?" Eléna looked away.

"Would *you*?" demanded Nadiézhda bluntly.

"I do not know." Eléna's tone was serious. "I am not certain how I feel to him."

"Then you do not love him!"

"Do I not?"

Naddi cast at Eléna a quick and puzzled glance.

5

That same afternoon Eléna went to the villa of Stephen Earle. As she entered, a tall, blond young woman, dressed in the severe uniform of a nurse, rose and met her.

"*Zdrástvuiète!*" said Eléna, with a sad smile, "I am the daughter of Dr. Malinóffsky. Poor Monsieur Earle is a friend of mine."

"*Zdrástvuiète*——"

"Eléna Borisovna," supplied Eléna, as she hesitated. "You, I suppose, are the nurse engaged by my father to care for my poor friend."

"Yes, Eléna Borisovna."

"Are you from Khárkoff?"

"Yes. I have finished the medical faculty of the Khárkoff University."

"We also are from Khárkoff. Will you tell me your name?"

"Zenaída Simiónovna."

"Tell me, Zenaída Simiónovna, when was the doctor here last?"

"Only an hour ago, Eléna Borisovna."

"And what did he say?"

"That there was no perceptible change. The pulse is very low. The bullet was probed for, and removed."

"You were told——"

"I was told, yes—that the patient had shot himself."

"You are, of course, discreet."

"In my profession—yes. We must be that."

Eléna looked at her earnestly.

"I like your face, Zenaída Simiónovna. I am sure you are skilled and efficient. I am glad that you were chosen."

"Thank you, Eléna Borísovna."

Followed by the nurse, Eléna entered Earle's bedroom. It was not till she saw the marble face, the closed eyes and tightly compressed lips, from which seemed to issue no breath, that she realized fully what Earle's love affair with Liúba Yermoláeva had cost him.

"Oh, Zenaída Simiónovna!" she exclaimed, in an awed and frightened whisper. "He looks as though he were dead!"

"Fear not! He is alive!" replied the young nurse reassuringly. "His wound is serious, but he is not dead. The doctor said he might not recover consciousness for another day. That is, in case he does not——"

"Don't, Zenaída Simiónovna!" Eléna covered her face with her arm. She put her hand on Earle's brow; it was so cold she withdrew it with a shudder. Then she knelt by the bedside. She remained there for a very long time. Finally she rose and came to the young nurse, who saw that tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Take good care of him, Zenaída Simiónovna. I trust him to you. He is my friend. I am so sorry for him!" She turned away quickly to hide her emotions, and departed.

6

On her way back, Eléna passed the villa of Liúba Yermoláeva. She stopped short before the steps, and a vertical line came between her slightly slanting brows. Suddenly a queer light flashed in her gray eyes, and she walked quickly and resolutely up the steps.

"Liubóff Sergiévna *dóma*?"¹ she asked the animal-looking maid who answered her knock.

"*Dóma, bárishnaya!*"² But, the maid hesitated, "she gave orders—she does not care to see any one."

¹ "Is Liubóff Sergiévna at home?"

² "She is at home, Mademoiselle."

"She will see *me*." Eléna's voice was full of confidence. "Tell her it is Eléna Borísovna."

The maid ushered Eléna into the big sitting room. Eléna heard a faint murmur of voices at the back of the villa where Liúba's bedchamber was.

The maid returned.

"Liubóff Sergiévna will come immediately."

"Good!"

Some five minutes elapsed before Eléna's attentive ears caught the swish and rustle they were expecting. Liúba, pale and very beautiful, attired in a loose déshabillé of blue, appeared upon the threshold.

"Ah, it is you, Eléna?" she greeted languidly, with an implication of surprise. She rustled in and held out her hand. Eléna, with both hands behind her back, made no move to take it.

"You perhaps do not see, Eléna Borísovna, that I am offering you my hand," said Liúba, with an irritation which she still controlled.

"I see." Eléna's voice was uncompromising.

"You mean—you do not care to take it?"

"Exactly so!"

"Then why——" Liúba swept her trailing robes haughtily about her. "To what do I owe the honor of your call?"

"To the fact that I have something to say to you."

"You have apparently come to quarrel, if appearances are an indication. You forget, Eléna Borísovna, that we have absolutely no relation together. Your doings do not concern me, nor mine you."

"*Izvinitè!*"¹ rejoined Eléna, her gray eyes flashing. "Your doings concern me when they concern my friends."

"Your *friends*?"

"Stephen Earle is my friend," declared Eléna tensely; "Stephen Earle, whom you sent to his death!"

Liúba's penciled brows knit; her violet eyes flashed fire; and an angry flush mantled her fair, pale cheeks.

"I do not care to discuss Stepán Earle with *you*!"

"Do you not? I do not expect you to. I came simply to show you for once the thing you are!"

"Indeed!" Liúba's voice was ironical.

"Yes, Liúba Yermoláeva. You did not tell him the truth, and when he found it out, you drove him to despair—turned him out of your villa to take his life before your very door!"

¹ Your pardon.

"It is a lie!" exclaimed Liúba, her flush of anger suddenly fading. "It was Prince——"

She broke off suddenly, in confusion.

"Ah!" exclaimed Eléna keenly. "It was the Prince who shot him!"

"No!"

"Yes! You betrayed yourself. I understand everything now. It was your Prince who shot him. Earle was in your villa and the Prince discovered him. It is all plain to me now."

"It is a lie!" Liúba repeated, but Eléna's searching and inexorable eyes read Liúba's confusion like an open book, and Liúba knew it.

"Do you still claim that my accusation is untrue?" demanded Eléna with sudden anger, as she saw the sullen defiance on the beautiful, evil face.

"No. It is true. And what then?"

"What then? I will tell you what then!"

A red and surging wave engulfed her.

In an uninterrupted torrent of fierce and stinging words, Eléna told Liúba Yermoláeva what she thought of her. She minced no words. She characterized the life of Liúba since their school days in the raw, white, ugly light of truth. She painted Liúba's character in the most unflattering terms, while Liúba, pale and for once disconcerted, writhed visibly. She described her relations with Stephen Earle, laid bare her treacherous deceptions, showed her monstrous heartlessness.

"*Murderess!* That is what you are," she ended, with such fierceness that Liúba quailed. "You thought no one knew it, and you were already congratulating yourself, I presume, on your cleverness. Oh, I am glad I came, to prick the bubble of your wicked self-content—to tell you in the plainest words you ever heard the thing you are, what Stephen Earle—if he ever recovers—and I know you to be."

"You may tell what you want," replied Liúba in a hard voice, though her cheeks were flecked with red as though they had been lashed. "Prince Tatárinoff and I leave Slaviánsk to-morrow—together. Knowing that, I can take your insults with equanimity."

"You are a *vile* creature!" said Eléna with biting scorn. "Stephen Earle is well rid of you. An angel might as well love a hideous snake!" And she brushed past Liúba Yermoláeva and departed, her gray eyes blazing, yet content.

CHAPTER XVII

I

ELÉNA and Nadiézhda sat in Eléna's room that afternoon. The sunlit morning had shadowed into drab and become leaden; a mist had risen like a gray veil, and made hazy and uncertain the outlines of the swaying trees through the big windows, which had been closed; a fine rain started in.

Eléna, cross-legged as usual, sat in her big armchair; Nadiézhda on the bed.

They had been discussing Tóssia—the big and preoccupying question.

They had agreed that if Tóssia did not return by the morrow, a telegram must be sent to him at Warsaw. It was important that he should know the joyous news. Nadiézhda had already suggested that Anatól should remain in Warsaw, and that he should visit her in Petersburg in the winter—perhaps.

What would happen in the winter was only vaguely indicated, but Eléna thought she understood.

Eléna was in a restless mood that afternoon; the shock of Earle's disaster struggled with the gladness over Tóssia; and underneath both ran the pride of Makedónsky's admission of his love, and the sense of loss that he would go away.

For some time the two girls had sat in silence.

"Eléna," exclaimed Nadiézhda abruptly, lowering her voice. "Some one is rapping at our window!"

"Nonsense! We are on the second story; no one could be on the upper balcony now."

"I tell you that some one is rapping. I have heard it distinctly twice."

"But, Naddi!"

"I tell you some one is rapping," insisted Nadiézhda obstinately.

Eléna looked frightened.

"Naddi, don't! You know how those things frighten me!"

Nadiézhda rose suddenly and went to the window, rubbed the mist from the pane.

"There is some one out there on the balcony—a man——"

Suddenly she cried out joyously, almost with a scream:

"Tóssia!"

She opened the window.

A man in uniform rose darkly before their eyes, climbed up over the window ledge, and leaped heavily into the room.

"Tóssia!"

Both girls ran toward him with outstretched arms, and then recoiled.

Caked with mud, with wet, matted hair, and the face of a madman, with insanely glaring eyes and lips that quivered palely beneath the slight mustache—— Could this be Tóssia?

"Listen! You must help me!" The deep voice was tense and metallic; the big body was all a-tremble.

"Help you, Tóssia? Of course we will help you," began Nadiézhda reassuringly, with a warning glance at Eléna.

"You do not understand!" He spoke hoarsely, panting, like some frightened animal, or as though he had been running. "I have killed Makedónsky!"

Speechless, horrified, the two girls stared aghast.

"Killed Makedónsky? Think what you are saying!" cried Nadiézhda sharply, seizing him by the arm in anguish. "You do not mean that, Tóssia. Say you do not mean it!"

"I tell you I have killed him!" repeated Tóssia, beside himself. "I was coming up from the other station. I met him face to face on the steppe. It was his life or mine. We were on even terms. 'Your life or mine, Makedónsky!' I cried to him as we met. He started to speak, but drew his revolver when he saw mine. We exchanged shots. He fell—near his own door. His orderly——"

"Oh, my poor boy, what have you done?" lamented Nadiézhda pitifully.

Eléna, who had been standing in appalled silence, her hand upon her heart, went slowly to her brother.

"You are a murderer," she said in a clear, inexorable voice. "A murderer. A low, common murderer! Colonel Makedónsky promised me only this morning that he would have you reinstated in the Army."

"And you waylay him like a cowardly, vile *razbóinik*,¹ force him all unwilling to fight with you, and shoot him dead. You are a murderer. *I hope you will be hung!*"

"Eléna!" Nadiézhda seized her by the shoulders and shook

¹ Bandit.

her. "Eléna! Are you out of your senses? Do you realize what you are saying? Your own brother!"

"I do not care," returned Eléna, with the same inexorable calm. "He has murdered him. I beg you to take him from this room."

Nadiézhda's dark eyes flashed fire.

"Fear not! I will take him away from you! Of every one you think, except of him. Even that American received more pity from you than your own brother. I, at least, do not blame him. Makedónsky received his just deserts." She turned swiftly to Anatól and put her arms about him. "Tóssia, my poor, distracted, unjustly-treated boy, come with me. If all thy own cast thee out, I will take thee in. They shall not hang thee; no, not even if thy own sister wishes it!"

Heavily, Tóssia turned and followed Nadiézhda to the door. At the threshold he turned, his features working, great tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Sister!" he muttered imploringly. "They dismissed me from the army. I went through hell! And I did not know——"

She pointed to the door, not trusting herself to speak. He turned again and left the room. The door clanged after him.

2

Eléna was stunned.

Slowly she came again to her senses. The shock of Makedónsky's assassination had left her soul isolated, marooned upon some desert rock.

"Oh," she cried, a strange little cry, as she recalled the melancholy luster of Tóssia's dark and pleading eyes.

Motionless she stood there. Finally she went to the door; the two departing ones heard the bolt shoot into the deep lock.

And outside, Tóssia, with a groan, hid his convulsed face in his big hands; between the long fingers trickled burning tears.

But Nadiézhda came close to him on the stairs. Put her soft arms around his neck, drew his big head upon her breast, smoothed the dark storm of clustering hair, and kissed his face again and again, as women kiss when men whom they love are in the depths.

"*Né plach!*" (Weep not) she repeated, over and over again. "*Né plach!* It was not thy fault! I understand. I understand. When the whole world has turned from thee, thy Nádia will be with thee still! *Né plach*, Tóssochka, my little dove, my little heart; *né plach*, Tóssia, my love, my mate, my husband!"

All that dark afternoon Eléna remained in her room, lying on her side upon her narrow bed, staring with fierce, wet eyes at the blank-white wall, hearing almost unconsciously the faint, far-off pealing of the cathedral bells from Slaviánsky Górod.

She rose for a moment toward evening meal, when a maid knocked, bearing a message. Dr. Malinóffsky wished to know if she was not coming down to dinner. Eléna, having sent her downstairs again with a pretext of headache, closed the door and went back to bed. Later on there came another knock.

"It is I," came Nadiézhda's well-known voice.

Eléna, in a weary voice, told her to enter.

Nadiézhda came to the bed and placed one hand upon Eléna's shoulder. "Eléna, you must be brave. You must gather all your strength. Be superhuman. Your brother's life is at stake."

"I know," responded Eléna wearily. "I must get up and help him, I know. But it is very hard."

She rose to a sitting position in the bed, her long, dark hair falling in confusion about her face.

"May I tell him to come to you?" implored Nadiézhda. "He is in his room, waiting."

"Yes," Eléna consented, though her hands clenched, and she bit her lips until they almost bled.

It was half-past six by the French clock ticking away so busily upon the table, quite oblivious to profound and weighty questions of life and death, when Tóssia's heavy step resounded on the wooden floor of the second story.

Then came his rap.

"Sister!" he muttered through the door. Eléna heard, from the deep tremble of his tone, that he was in distress.

She rose quickly, went to the door, and threw it open.

"Come in, Tóssia!" she said, in a tired voice, going back again into the room.

Tóssia's bulky figure stood framed in the doorway. His face drawn and haggard; his eyes glowing darkly and feverishly in sunken sockets, he stood there, timid, irresolute, not daring to come in.

"Come in, Tóssia, come in, Tóssochka!" repeated Eléna, in the same even, tired tone. The diminutive gave Tóssia courage; he entered, closing the door behind him softly.

"Come over here!" said Eléna in the same tone. She sat in the big armchair near the window.

Tóssia came over. She pointed to the little footstool, covered with blue-flowered chintz, that stood near her bed. Tóssia sank down upon it, and laid his curly head humbly, without a word, upon her lap, the old familiar attitude, when the brother had been suffering and in distress. Staring with blank, unseeing eyes through the half-open window, through which the damp mist entered, she played gently and caressingly with his dark and stormy locks, as Nadiézhda had done, and with a love, all different in its kind, no less than hers.

And after a while she asked him to tell her how it all happened, and briefly, in his deep, growling accents, he narrated to her the sequence of events.

When he told her of how Makedónsky fell, silently, without a word, and lay quiet, Eléna began violently to tremble.

"*Oh, Bózhè!*" she sobbed, bending low over her brother's curly head. "Poor Makedónsky. Both together! Oh, could you not leave me one?"

"Have you and Naddi made any plans?" she asked at length, with an effort.

"I must leave Slaviánsk. At once," said Tóssia in his deep growl. "Makedónsky's orderly rushed out—he must have heard the shots; he carried him in—I do not think he saw me in the mist. But my feud with Makedónsky is known. I shall be arrested, tried. I must leave to-night!"

"Papa has to know," Eléna declared firmly, drying her eyes, all energy now, as women are, when something must be done. "I'll go to him and tell him all about it. He will be far less stormy with me than with you, and I can prepare the way for his seeing you. Yes, Papa must know. You will need money, much money."

She rose quickly.

"I will see him right after dinner," she promised. "Meanwhile go and pack your things; everything must be ready as soon as Papa knows."

Tóssia stood before her, big and powerful. A light of gratitude and love flashed in his eyes (he was at bottom afraid of his father, as Eléna too well knew) and he made as if to embrace her. Instinctively she drew away; an expression of suffering flitted over her face.

"Don't be offended, Tóssia. Don't be hurt," she whispered, gazing at him sadly as she saw the melancholy light leap back

into the big brown eyes. "I love you, you know that; but I can't—just now—so soon——"

So Tóssia went, and she was alone trying to collect her scattered thoughts.

She would catch her father immediately after dinner. No, that would never do. He was always irritable after dinner. She must wait until later. But perhaps that would be dangerous for Tóssia; perhaps he should be leaving even now. Yet Tóssia's whole fate depended on her father's attitude. On the whole, weighing intensely the pros and cons, she determined to wait until later, when her father would be in a milder and more receptive frame of mind.

4

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening when Eléna came down.

Mária Grigórevna, the Pope's wife, sat all alone upon the misty balcony, reading by the light of the piazza lamps.

She looked up with a smile as Eléna came up the steps. Every one liked Eléna.

"Zdrástè, Eléna Borísovna! I have seen you so little of late! Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"I have been out very little the last two or three days," replied Eléna with some reserve, for she had heard lately from various sources of Mária Grigórevna's persistent intrigue with the Prokurór, and she did not like it. (Mária Grigórevna, the wife of a Pope, a priest of the Holy Greek Catholic Church!) "Have you seen Papa?" she asked distraitly, casting a glance toward the door of Dr. Malinóffsky's office, at the left of the long balcony.

"Yes, he is in his study."

Whereupon, Dr. Malinóffsky's door rattled and opened, and the Doctor's tall, spare, somewhat stooping form appeared upon the threshold.

With apprehension, Eléna gazed at the stern, haggard face, at the high, corrugated brow, the firmly compressed mouth beneath the heavy fringe of iron-gray mustache, the long, fan-like, snowy beard.

A silent, self-centered man, who had long ago withdrawn into himself. A man whom Life had disillusioned. A man with a deep and noble heart.

"Oh, Papa!" said Eléna, rising and going toward him. "I want

to see you about something. May I come into your study for a few minutes?"

Dr. Malinóffsky's sensibilities were, and always had been, keenly acute. Ekaterína Ivánovna was wont to say, "Ah, *diéti!* (children). You think Papa hears nothing, sees nothing, of what is going on! He hears and sees everything! In this very sanatorium, nothing escapes his observation. He knows of every flirtation of the Prokurór; he knows every feeling of every person here to all the others. Don't try to deceive Papa, *diéti!* I tell you in advance you won't succeed!"

He cast at her a long, keen glance.

"Enter!" he bade her.

Eléna entered and closed the door behind her.

"*Shtó takóè!*" (What is it?) asked her father quickly in his deep, bass voice, the voice so much like Tóssia's, his darkly burning eyes fixed on her face, which had suddenly grown quite pale.

"Papa!" she stammered, miserably ill at ease, as Dr. Malinóffsky's children always were when in their father's presence, especially when anything was wrong. "It is about Tóssia!"

"*What* with him?" growled Dr. Malinóffsky again, a frown settling on his face. Tóssia had become with him something like a sickness; the mere mention of his name made him almost frantic.

"Papa!" began Eléna, gazing at her father bravely. "I have bad news to tell——"

"Bad news?" the old man's face became yellow; he put his hand suddenly upon his heart.

"Papa," she went on quickly. "Tóssia has got into trouble, serious trouble; only thou canst help him now!"

"Why dost thou shilly-shally and beat about the bush?" cried her father with sudden fury. "Out with it now, and get it over with! What has he been doing now?"

"He has shot a man," said Eléna quickly, her heart pounding.

"Shot a man?" repeated Dr. Malinóffsky mechanically, as though not comprehending. "Shot a man? Shot a man? *What* man?"

"Colonel Makedónsky," answered Eléna, her pale lips quivering.

"*Good God!!*"

Dr. Malinóffsky sat down with a crash upon his low leather divan, his hand still clutching at his heart, the other covering his eyes.

Smitten by his agony, Eléna threw herself down beside him, wound her arms around him, kissed his sleeve in a sudden little frenzy of love and pity.

"Oh, Papa, oh, Papa, dear Papa!" she cried. "Don't take it so to heart. It wasn't Tóssia's fault. It was forced on him. Thou knowest it was Makedónsky who had Tóssia dismissed from the army. Tóssia is only a human being. He didn't really kill him. Tóssia had just come back from Warsaw. They met in the steppe; they exchanged shots. . . . It was not an assassination!"

Dr. Malinóffsky slowly took his hand from his pain-filled eyes, and stared at Eléna haggardly, his gray face quivering.

"Not an assassination! Was it not my boy who killed him?"

"It was the bullet from Tóssia's pistol, Papa. But Colonel Makedónsky ruined Tóssia's whole career (she did not mention Makedónsky's relenting), and refused to give him satisfaction. They had a quarrel—at the Charity ball, and Makedónsky refused to fight with him, threatened him with arrest and deportation to Siberia for striking him. Then Tóssia, thou knowest, went to Warsaw, and they court-martialed him and dismissed him from the army. Canst thou not see how all this worked on him? Canst thou not understand the mood in which he returned from Warsaw?"

"*Ponimáiu!*" (I understand) said Dr. Malinóffsky nodding his head mechanically up and down. "*Ponimáiu!*"

His voice was so sad, his whole mien, that of a very old man, was so broken and sorrowful that Eléna's heart went out to him.

Sobbing bitterly, she threw herself in her father's arms.

"Oh, Papa!" she moaned, hiding her face in his soft, silken beard, as in the old days when she had been a little child. "Oh, Papa! I am suffering too. You don't know. . . . Makedónsky loved me!"

Dr. Malinóffsky pressed her to his breast.

"All this is tragic!" he muttered, nodding his head oddly up and down. Suddenly he arose, pushing Eléna from him.

"Where is Anatól?" he asked, in an altered voice, standing tall and formidable in the middle of the room. "What is happening? In what can I help the miserable boy now?"

"Papa!" said Eléna, sitting up with streaming eyes. "If Tóssia does not go away at once, he may have to pay for this duel with his life!"

"Ah!" grated Dr. Malinóffsky. "He wants to run away, does he?"

"Yes!" Eléna rose like a lioness to defend her offspring. "Why shouldn't he? Would you have him stay in Russia until a cruel and barbaric government takes his life?"

"Was it not cruel and barbaric for him to take Makedónsky's life?" cried her father with flashing eyes, raising his powerful voice. "He will get no help from me if he acts the coward now. Thou canst go to him and tell him that for me!"

And obstinately he set his will against what Eléna's feminine and practical instinct told her was the only solution.

For a moment she felt something like despair. Then courage came to her.

"But, *Pápochka!* Dost thou realize that he may be arrested, condemned, deported, perhaps executed? Dost thou wish to sacrifice the life of thy own son, for that's what it will mean, in such a country as Russia?"

"In *any* country!" interrupted Dr. Malinóffsky emphatically.

"No. Not in any country!" flung back Eléna desperately, for she was fighting now with her back against the wall. "Any *civilized* country would weigh the facts, consider the circumstances, seek to do justice. Russia, ruled only by military and nobility, will exact vengeance for the death of one of the most aristocratic, brilliant, and celebrated officers that she possessed. They will shoot Tóssia down like a mad dog; they will hang him like a common malefactor. O *Pápochka*, think of Mama!"

The old man, still obstinate, yet moved by her words, shook his big, bald head and foamy beard from side to side like a sullen old bull, dazed, perplexed by some sudden, unexpected attack.

"It is the *principle* of the thing! I want no cowards in my family!" he muttered obstinately; but Eléna, feeling that he was shaken, continued her assault.

"Papa, think! think! While we are talking, perhaps, the gendarmes are on their way to arrest him. Wilt thou deliver him over into their brutal hands to butcher him, whenever and however they see fit? Oh, Tóssia! poor Tóssia! Think, Papa, thy own son! And think of Mama! Her heart will be broken!"

Her father was silent. He was thinking, with livid face and frowning brows.

"Where is he?" he asked after a minute, with a fierceness which boded ill for Tóssia whenever he might appear.

"I don't know, Papa. I think he is in his room," she bit her tongue just as she was on the point of adding the word "pack-

ing." "Oh, *may* I go to him and tell him that he—that thou——"

"Thou canst go to him and tell him to come here to me!" interrupted her father fiercely, as before.

But Eléna, no longer fearing his fierceness, for she knew with woman's infallible instinct, in despite of men, that she was victorious, flew on wings out of the study upstairs to Tóssia's room.

5

"Tóssia, Tóssia," she cried, almost before the door was open. "Papa has consented to help thee get away. He wants to see thee in his study."

Tóssia, big and gloomy, stood in the middle of the room before his open trunk. Nadiézhda was going and coming, helping him to pack.

"*Khoroshò!*"¹ growled Anatól, visibly discomfited by the prospect. A *tête-à-tête* with Dr. Malinóffsky had never been considered in the family in the light of a desideratum. And now——!

"Oh, Tóssia, you must go at once!" urged Nadiézhda, grasping, from Eléna's joyous face, the situation.

"Yes!" chimed in Eléna. "Thou knowest how Papa is, Tóssia. Thou must strike while the iron is hot. I'll go down with thee and wait outside the study till thou comest out."

"I'll go down with you," spoke up Nadiézhda quickly.

The three went out together, down the white gleaming stairs, through the inner hall to the study.

"Tóssia," Eléna detained Anatól a moment as he stepped forward, ill at ease, but sustained by his strong and obstinate will, which he inherited from his father. "Don't quarrel with Papa. I *beg* thee! Be conciliatory. Accept whatever he may say to thee. Remember how much he has always done for us all, and how disappointed he has been with thee. Don't take what he says amiss, Tóssia dear; thou knowest thyself how he hoped to give thee a brilliant and successful career. He is disappointed—and this, and Makedónsky——"

"I will do my best!" growled Tóssia. "But he must not insult me too much either. I'm a human being, too, thou knowest!"

"Yes, Tóssochka, I know. We know," chimed both women together, "but thou must be conciliatory; you must be respectful, Tóssia!" urged each respectively.

¹ Very well!

"I'll do my best!" Tóssia declared again, in his deep tones, and with that he left them, and knocked at the door of the study. The two standing there in the corridor heard no voice from inside, but Anatól turned the knob and entered; the heavy door closed behind him.

In suspense they stood waiting in a listening attitude, in tense silence.

6

At first they could hear nothing; then they caught the faint reverberation of the two men's voices; that of old Dr. Malinóffsky always in the lead; he was questioning Tóssia about all that had occurred. The questioning voice became louder and more imperious, the answers briefer, more sullen, and in a lower key. Then suddenly Dr. Malinóffsky's voice became thunderous. They could plainly distinguish the words.

"Both coward and liar!"

Then as they grew pale and rigid from fear they heard the answering voice of Anatól, deep, bell-like, trembling with passion, unrecognizable.

"The fact that I was willing to face death——"

"*What* death? The man did not even want to shoot at you."

"Did I know that? Did I know that?"

"I will not bandy words with you. Will you give me one reason why I should help you now to run away? One! I have done everything for you! What have you ever given me in return? Nothing and worse than nothing! Shame, sir, and disgrace and bitterness of soul, that is all I have ever had from you, that and nothing more. Oh, thou ungrateful son——"

The strong and passion-filled voice broke in agony.

"O *Pápochka!* my poor *Pápochka!*" cried Eléna, in a sudden agony of pity, bursting into tears.

"Listen!"

Tóssia was talking in a low and steady strain, he was explaining, justifying, appealing; his silent tongue was unloosed at last.

"Oh, thank God," sighed Eléna. "Tóssia is speaking now to Papa heart to heart. It is years since they had an explanation like this."

"It will do good!" whispered Nadiézhda. "I am sure it will bring them closer together."

But the son's voice went on and on, it seemed for ages, and all of a sudden his voice broke; he was weeping now, as only

a strong man can weep, sobbing convulsively as he spoke; and in sympathy the tears rolled down Eléna's cheeks, and she did not even know she wept.

"And I loved you——" they heard Tóssia say, in a voice that suddenly broke.

And then Dr. Malinóffsky's voice resounded again—two words——

"My son!"

Then all words ceased, while Anatól sobbed out his sorrow-laden heart upon his father's breast.

7

For what seemed a long time (it was in reality about three minutes), Anatól's deep sobs went on. Then finally they ceased. They heard Dr. Malinóffsky rise and walk across the floor of the study; the jingle of keys, the unlocking of a lock; the dragging of an iron box across a shelf. Then the door was slammed, and locked again. A low murmur from Anatól. Then some brief instructions from Dr. Malinóffsky; the door of the study opened.

Anatól came out, approaching the two women.

"*Vsë khoroshò!*"¹ he growled to Eléna. She saw that his eyes were red, and that his still boyish mouth beneath the slight mustache was all a-tremble.

"He consents?"

"Yes."

"When dost thou leave?"

"To-night. Or rather in the morning, at one o'clock."

"Oh, Tóssia, art thou not afraid to wait so long?"

"The morning train is safer!" growled Anatól in response.

"I've got to take the risk until then!"

"But where art thou going?"

"To Germany, Berlin. Papa has friends there. I will study at the University for a year."

"But the money, did Papa give thee money?"

"Money?"

Tóssia drew from his trouser-pocket an enormous roll of bills.

"Look!" he growled, turning round toward Eléna and Nadiézhda.

Every bill bore the imprint 100.

"Two hundred of them!" said Anatól. "Two thousand rubles,

¹ Everything is all right.

part of papa's money; from his edition, you know. He will send me a draft later when I am in Berlin. Now I have to finish packing."

Eléna and Anatól, with arms enlaced in the expansion of brotherly and sisterly love which always followed some family crisis, went up the stairs together, followed closely by Nadiézhda.

The three went up to Tóssia's room.

8

Tóssia, according to his usual indolent custom, lay stretched out to his whole bulky length upon the narrow bed. He wore his uniform to which, while waiting for the Governmental thunderbolt to fall, he had obstinately clung. His saber hung suspended by its girders from a hook on the wall beside his bed. His whole room, always characteristically untidy, books, newspapers, boots, cigarettes, articles of clothing being thrown around indiscriminately on chairs, tables, in corners, on the floor, was now worse than ever. Aniúta, the sly Muscovite maid, who liked to make Eléna's room in the morning, abhorred similarly the making of the room of Anatól.

"Big, hulking brute!" she often confided to Marfúshia on coming down from the morning tidying. "A *skandál*,¹ that's what I call it! A *muzhik* would be ashamed of such piggery! What does he think I am, anyway? It takes me almost an hour to fix his room. . . . I told Ekaterína Ivánovna that I couldn't do it, that I felt despair the very minute I open the door. 'Don't be too conscientious!' says Ekaterína Ivánovna, with the little twinkle in her eyes she has sometimes when she's in a good humor. 'You may be sure that he will never notice if his room is tidy or not!' His own mother, *zamiékhdeté*" (mind you), "and she as neat as a pin, too! So now it takes me only half an hour. At first, may God punish me! I used to spend an hour and a half there every blessed morning!"

You may be sure, at least, that Tóssia did not notice, that night of nights, his room's untidiness.

Lying propped up on one elbow, he smoked his cigarettes, one after the other, more somber and unapproachable than ever. His large brown eyes glowed stern and fixed. Over him brooded Death and the gigantic symbolism of the Law. What was this grim, unknown Personality, that Fate had at last evoked, and where was the sick, neurasthenic boy?

¹ Disgrace.

9

A knock resounded at the door.

"Enter!" bade Tóssia, in his deep bass.

The heavy white door creaked and opened slightly; a pale and piquantly beautiful face looked in.

"Are you all here?" asked the sonorous voice of—, Anastásia Aleksándrovna. "I was alone in my room, and getting very dull, so I came up to have a chat with all of you. They told me you were here."

"Come in!" invited Eléna with cold astonishment, immediately justified by the sudden rising of Anatól's long figure from the bed and his deliberate departure from the room.

"Polite, isn't he?" exclaimed Anastásia, her pale cheeks flushing, her velvety dark eyes filled with a resentful glow.

"Perhaps," flashed back Nadiézhda viciously, before Eléna could speak. "And perhaps not! No one has to show courtesy to people who do not show common decency!"

"Do you mean me?" asked Anastásia, in a trembling voice.

"Of course I mean you! Why do you come here? What do you want? You, the woman who forced yourself upon him when he had no love for you—he told me so himself—you, on whose account——"

"Naddi!" exclaimed Eléna warningly.

"On whose account—what?" asked Anastásia.

Nadiézhda took Eléna aside and they conferred for a moment in whispers.

"Why not tell her!" Nadiézhda was saying. "Let her know what she has done!"

"But suppose she should be indiscreet?"

"She won't if we warn her. And Tóssia will be in Germany within two days."

They finally decided to tell her.

"Anastásia Aleksándrovna," began Eléna, "swear that you will never reveal to a living soul what I am about to tell you now."

"I swear," replied Anastásia, impressed by the solemnity of Eléna's manner.

"Tóssia has killed Makedónsky."

"Killed Makedónsky!" repeated Anastásia, her pale face turning paler.

"Yes, Makedónsky is dead."

Whereupon both Nadiézhda and Eléna began to weep, as

women will when Disaster and Death hang over them, and Anastásia, after the first shrinking moment of horror, wept too, for a moment, dabbing at her eyes with her lace-trimmed handkerchief. But she did not weep long.

"God knows," she said at last, after the two women's sobs had died away, "God knows, Nadiézhda Petróvna, who accuse me so bitterly, and you, Eléna Borísovna, who are too big-souled and too magnanimous to accuse me, that I never meant to bring disaster on Anatól. Maksím had been gone from Warsaw for weeks. I thought he had abandoned me, and I was dying of *skúka* (ennui), and I needed a vacation in some place where I could bathe and rest, and Anatól lived here. And then quite unexpectedly Maksím came here too. Don't you see how it all came about? Don't you understand? It was all a mistake. I see it now. Tóssia really didn't love me. I discovered it very soon after I arrived here. And I didn't love him, either. It was all a terrible blunder, but once you're in the net it isn't easy to get out. Wait till you've been down in the depths, both of you, and you'll find out. Wait till life has bruised and mistreated you as it has me, and you'll see how hard it is to undo the consequences of even the slightest and most thoughtless of our acts. I ought to have gone away, but Maksím told me when he met me at the station that I was to stay here until I heard from him; and I was afraid to leave. I am afraid of him, you know," she added naïvely. "I am a terrible coward, and Maksím has always frightened me; he had something so inhuman in him, some cold and powerful and terrifying force. But I am sorry he is dead! And it's true—it's all my fault. Oh, I am so unhappy!"

Suddenly she put her face in her hands and began to sob violently.

The other two women looked at her uncomfortably. Then Eléna's heart was stirred. She went over to Anastásia, whose tall and slender form shook with sobs, and put her arm around her.

"There, there!" she comforted her, seeking to be kind. "Don't cry. I know now, and Naddi knows, that you didn't do it intentionally. It's all a complexity of Fate. No one is to blame, and we're all to blame, and the harm is done, and we're all responsible in greater or lesser degree. All we can do is to trust and pray."

Anastásia, her dark eyes overflowing with tears, took down her hands and gazed at Eléna with sudden fear. "But Tóssia,

what will become of him? Is it known that he—that he killed Makedónsky?"

"We hope not. He is going abroad to-night."

A silence fell upon them then. And they talked a little, in subdued voices, and wept a little; and Anastásia left, saying that she did not wish to keep Anatól out of his own room. . . . And she was sorry, oh so sorry, for—— She suddenly put her handkerchief to her eyes, and went out crying.

10

So Anastásia departed, and went to her room, which was at the end of the corridor, overlooking the dark and rustling *dvor*.

She had not even found matches to light her lamp, when a strong imperious rap, a rap with a purpose, resounded at her door.

Tóssia! It must be he! He had come to curse her, to revile her, to slay her, as she deserved.

Her heart suddenly athrob, she groped in the darkness to the door, and opened it, peering out into the dim-lit hall, where a man's figure stood.

"Who is it? Is that you, Tóssia?"

"Your pardon!" came a man's voice unknown to her, respectful but firm. "Is this the room of Anastásia Aleksándrovna?"

"Yes."

"I have a letter for Your Nobility which I am charged to deliver only to Your Nobility in person."

"Wait!" Her heart pounding, she went back and lighted the lamp. Then she came to the door, and took the letter from the man's hand, tore it open, found a single sheet of paper folded twice, opened it, and read a single word, written in a bold and characteristic hand:

"Come!"

It was like a Voice, a strong, imperious, commanding Voice, which crushed down all resistance at the start.

Her shaking fingers let the sheet and envelope drop upon the floor.

"Does Your Nobility desire to send back any answer?" came again the messenger's firm, respectful voice.

"No. Yes. Say that I will come!"

"Precisely so, Your Nobility! Your Nobility will come. *Proshchdetè* (Farewell), Your Nobility!"

CHAPTER XVIII

I

AFTER Anastásia's departure the two girls sat in silence for a little while. "Anatól has gone to his mother's room, I suppose," surmised Nadiézhda, disquieted. "Perhaps I had better go and call him."

"No," advised Eléna. "I think it would be better to leave him alone for a while. Poor Tóssia!" she exclaimed, wiping her eyes. "How the poor boy must be suffering now, with all his silence——"

"Oh, Naddi!" she continued, her voice trembling. "It's when I think of him as a little boy that it hurts me so. I always think of him as a little boy, with his big, dark eyes, his little mouth; how he suffered with Papa and with us all! We didn't treat him right. We didn't understand him. Mama was always scolding him. Papa, turned against him by Mama's and Mússia's complaints, was always storming at him. That terrible scene, when Tóssia pointed a pistol at Papa and threatened to shoot him, was really poor Mama's fault. And I remember, when Tóssia had been beaten and humiliated as a boy, how he would always come to me for comfort and consolation. Sometimes at one o'clock in the morning I would hear a tapping at my door; a tapping I would lie in the darkness on my bed, waiting for, unable to sleep until it came. And I would light my candle and open the door; and Tóssia would creep in, and gaze at me in anguish, like a beaten dog, and I would take him in my arms, and we would weep together. I would soothe his grief and bitterness like a little mother, and our tears would mingle, and I would talk to him and give the boy courage to go on with his life which, now that I look back, I see was bitterly unhappy from his very childhood."

"How did he ever learn to play the piano so wonderfully?" asked Nadiézhda, to divert Eléna's thoughts.

"I don't know; none of us know. I doubt if he knows himself. He absolutely hated his music lessons! Mademoiselle Léontine (our governess, you know), and later Signor Cavallini,

that Italian music-teacher, you remember, who had such a brilliant success in Khárkoff, and who suddenly had to take flight because of a scandal, *pómmish?*¹ could do nothing with him. He wouldn't study; he wouldn't practice; he would run away when it was time for his music lesson. One day Fraülein Keuschenbaum struck him for not obeying her. He became like a madman, and struck her back. Mama set up lamentations, and Papa stormed like a madman, and beat him with a whip. But nothing would help. So his lessons were stopped.

"One day, several months later—I shall never forget it—Tóssia was about fifteen, but as big as a man of thirty, I came in late one afternoon from school, with my books in my sack. It was snowing heavily; the whole city was shrouded in a white and feathery pall; you couldn't see a foot before you. And as the maid opened the door, I heard such rich, divine floods of harmony from the drawing-room. But such *hauntingly* beautiful music, played with such mastery! 'Who is that playing, Natásha?' I asked our maid, as she let me in.

"'Why, it's the young *bárin*, Eléna Borisovna!' she answered in a low voice. 'He always plays like that when the family is out.' And amazed, delighted, carried away with loving pride and admiration (with all my lessons I could never play like that!) I threw my books down and ran into the drawing-room; and he had not heard the bell, nor me coming in; he sat there completely absorbed, lost in some inner world, his face upraised, his eyes closed, his big body swaying rhythmically from side to side, his big hands racing swiftly and masterfully over the keys. *Such* music! It was like Heaven to listen to it. He started like a guilty thing when I spoke to him, and leaped up as though he had been guilty of some crime.

"'Oh, Tóssia!' I cried, throwing my arms around his neck. 'What wonderful, wonderful music! How did you ever learn to play like that?'

"Shyly, timidly, like a little boy, in spite of his big body, he asked me if I really thought he played well. And when I praised him to the skies, he called me Liessútochka, his greatest endearment, and kissed me, and the whole story came out.

"Tóssia all this time had been playing and playing at the house of a school-friend till he knew every chord and key on the whole piano, and he had actually begun to compose; all that rich, strange music was his own, *podúmaetè!*² and he had composed

¹ Dost thou remember?

² Just think!

a wonderful polka for his friend's sweetheart, who was a Polish girl, and that very year he played it at a charity concert in Khárkoff, and the whole city spoke of it, and of Tóssia's playing, and both Papa and Mama, to say nothing of myself, were pleased and proud. Poor Tóssia! my dear, sulky, deep-hearted bear of a brother, my poor, unhappy boy!"

Eléna was crying now.

"That's all he is to me, Naddi!" she exclaimed, with streaming eyes. "Just a boy. A big, lumbering, unhappy boy, *my* boy, who always came to me for comfort when he was sad. And I didn't treat him right this summer. My conscience smites me. I shouldn't have been cold with him so long, just because he pointed that revolver at me and threatened, as with Papa that time, to shoot me like a dog! I should have remembered how unhappy he had always been, and how harshly Papa was treating him, and how worried he was over all his debts, and over the complication with Makedónsky, and that his poor, bruised, unhappy heart was sick."

And so she palliated, and pitied, and sought extenuation, and heaped blame liberally on her own head.

Nadiézhda soothed her and consoled her, though herself sick with anguish and apprehension, and so the slow time wore away.

"I think I had better go," said Nadiézhda, rising at last. "I will come over later—before Tóssia goes."

2

Nadiézhda slipped quietly away.

It was Eléna, after all, who finished Tóssia's packing.

It was agreed that Anatól should keep out of sight until he left to get his train.

Wearied out, physically and mentally depressed, Eléna felt as though she had passed through a bad dream.

She sat in her room, looking out across her balcony. The rain and mist had cleared away; bright silver stars were twinkling in a deep blue sky. Anatól was lying in his dark room, the door double-bolted on the inside. Her father and mother were closeted together in the study. She knew that her father was telling Ekaterína Ivánovna of all that had occurred.

Strange and fantastic the shadows deepened, lengthened, filled her room with gloom. Lost in revery she sat, thinking of all that had been, and was, and would be in the coming time.

And already Makedónsky seemed very dim and far away; he had gone upon some long journey from which he would never return. She felt somehow no pity, only an odd blankness—had she ever loved him after all?

Then suddenly the thought of Stephen Earle came to her; she had quite forgotten him all this time—he, too, seemed dim and far away, at first, for all the wild, nightmarish, sleepless night and tragic day had pushed him deeply back into her unconsciousness.

A pang shot suddenly into her heart; she was sorry for the American—sorrier than for Makedónsky.

She had grown fond of him, but to-night, while Tóssia was so sick—oh, no, Tóssia wasn't sick—she had confused him and the American.

Dimly, as through a haze, she heard the door of her father's study open, and his slow, heavy steps over the balcony and down the stairs. . . .

3

When she awoke her chamber was pitch dark, and some one was knocking at her door.

"Enter!" she cried drowsily, still half-asleep.

The door opened; Ekaterína Ivánovna came in.

"Thou art there, Elénokha? Thou hast slept long. Papa sent me for thee—to come to the study."

"At once," replied Eléna, still heavy with sleep. "Have I been asleep long?"

"Since nine o'clock; it is almost twelve now."

"Almost twelve!"

Startled Eléna sat up straight in her chair.

"And Tóssia——"

"He is leaving in about half an hour; all the family are in the study; come quickly!"

Eléna rose, arranged hastily her disordered hair, and she and her mother went downstairs.

"I was so tired!" she murmured apologetically, on the way. "I did not sleep all night, thou knowest."

"I know, I know," replied Ekaterína.

Eléna, in the yellow light from the table lamp in the corridor, looked closely at her mother's face. She had not immediately realized that her mother had only recently been informed of all that had occurred.

The face of Ekaterína Ivánovna showed in the yellow lamp-light very small, very wrinkled, like the tegument of a withered apple. Her gray-blue eyes through the big round lenses of her gold-bowed spectacles had in them a sorrowful light.

"Papa told thee?"

"Yes, everything. Poor Papa!" added Ekaterína, after a noticeable pause, as they reached the lower floor.

"Poor Papa!" echoed Eléna.

"This awful affair has hurt him dreadfully," went on Ekaterína. "It is terrible for us both."

"Has Anastásia Aleksándrovna left?"

"Who? That actress? Left? No! She has been away all evening. Little *she* cares for all *our* troubles, thou mayst be sure!"

"*Disgusting* actress!" she added, her usually soft voice trembling with passion.

"'Judge not, that ye be not judged!'" quoted Eléna, hardly conscious of what she said, remembering how Anastásia had wept.

"No child of mine can teach me Scripture!" burst out Ekaterína with sudden anger. "I know my duties to my neighbors as well as any one, and I can be charitable, too. But as to that cheap and tawdry actress who has ruined my boy's life with her intrigues, may God forgive her, Eléna, for I never can!"

Whereupon they reached the study. On the broad leather divan sat Dr. Malinóffsky himself, Aunt Sónia, and Nadiézhda. Anatól sat in the leather armchair, before the desk, where stood a lamp, in the white radiance of which the windows, heavily shuttered and barred, sent forth a blank, opaque glare, while from the case of test tubes in the corner—a whole rack of small bottles, tightly corked, imprisoning cultures of the deadliest diseases—came many a brilliant, coruscating gleam.

"Close the door and lock it," commanded Dr. Malinóffsky as Ekaterína and Eléna entered.

The door duly locked, the two women found seats in the patients' chairs along the wall, and silence, deep and solemn, fell.

"How is Tóssia going, Máma?" asked Eléna, in a whisper.

"By way of Libau; Papa thought Warsaw would be dangerous."

"Has he his passport?"

"Yes. Did you hear about Nadiézhda?"

"No; what?"

"She is going with him. They are to be married as soon as they reach Germany."

"*Nèuzhéli!*"¹ cried Eléna, gazing at Nadiézhda, who smiled a tired, yet radiant smile.

"But Piótr Samóilovich?"

"He knows nothing," explained Nadiézhda. "He has not heard a word. Vera knows, but she has promised to tell no one. Papa thinks I am going to Petersburg. I am a free agent, you know."

"Oh, Naddi!" cried Eléna, rising and going to her. "I am so glad! I have always loved you like a sister!"

"I know it, Eléna darling." Nadiézhda affectionately enfolded her in her arms.

"But your trunks?"

"Are packed—that is why I slipped away this afternoon; I could not bear to let our Tóssia go alone!"

"Oh, Naddi, I am so glad you are going with him. You will write to me from Germany?"

"Everything."

"It is almost time," growled Dr. Malinóffsky, looking at his watch. "Be silent, all of you!" he rasped despotically.

In silence they waited; suddenly Ekaterina began to weep.

"*Nu, rádi Bóga!*"² rasped Dr. Malinóffsky irritably. "Tears help nothing here!"

He rose and stood, gaunt and tall.

"Rise!" he said to Anatól.

Anatól, almost as tall as his father, though of stronger build, rose in turn.

Dr. Malinóffsky leaned forward and put both hands heavily on Tóssia's shoulders.

"Anatól," he rasped, in his deep chest tones, "it is time. Thou art going away from us, perhaps permanently."

"I have some words that I must say to thee, and I take this occasion in the presence of all our family and in the presence of Nadiézhda Petróvna, who will soon be thy wife, to say those words to thee publicly. So far, thou hast bitterly disappointed me. Yet I, in many respects, have been to thee a bad father. Thou knowest that I was once rich, and thou knowest also that through the dishonesty of one whom I had trusted I lost all. That embittered me early. I gambled at the club to forget

¹ You don't say so!

² For heaven's sake!

my sorrows. I neglected my family—withdrew into myself—did not and could not become my children's friend. For this I take great blame upon myself, and I feel less desire to blame thee, who now almost at the age of thirty, hast made an utter failure of thy life.

"But this I wish to say to thee. The broad and infinite ways of life are open to thee still. Thou hast been guilty of grievous sins. Thou hast taken from a man what no man can ever give him back, and this, try as I may, for reasons which I cannot see absolve thee in any way of thy responsibility both before God and man. Now I charge thee, thou must retrieve this past. Thou must fulfill the end which God assigns to us all, upon this Earth—thou must become a man. Too long hast thou played with Life, and thy play has brought thee low. One more chance I give thee, and one only. If thou disappointest me again, I swear that I will cast thee off forever. I am a man of few words, and I have said perhaps more than I needed. What now hast thou to answer me in return?"

"I, too, have few words!" came Anatól's deep growl, as he stared straight into his father's blazing eyes. "I will not promise anything. But thou shalt see, thou shalt see!"

The father opened his arms—the two embraced strongly, kissing each other on the cheek. Ekaterína Ivánovna and Aunt Sónia were crying together.

4

The sound of jangling bells came from the dark grassy street. "The *izvóshchik!*" murmured Anatól, unlocking the door.

The family reunion broke up. The *dvórník* carried out Anatól's trunk on his shoulders; Nadiézhda's trunk had already been brought, and stood just inside the high picket fence near the gate. The whole family stood on the big balcony, shrouded in darkness (the lights had been intentionally removed)—while Anatól went in to fetch his last belongings.

He came out a moment later, dressed in his loose military cloak, in which he looked taller and bigger than ever; his saber, hanging from the belt buckled around his massive girth, clanked metallically as he walked. His eyes gleamed black in the darkness; his shadowed face was set; he seemed in a single day to have grown years older.

Slowly the family accompanied him down the long path to the gate. Here he paused, again embraced his father. Ekaterína

Ivánovna, weeping bitterly, held up a blind and tear-wet face for a last kiss. He bent over her from his great height and crushed her small, frail form in a strong embrace. Then he turned to Eléna. The brother and sister fell into each other's arms. Eléna, like her mother, wept freely, yet she was glad that Anatól was going.

Nadiézhda, too, embraced, and was embraced by all.

"I will take care of him," she whispered to Ekaterína. "Don't grieve, *Mama*. I will be a true comrade, a loving loyal wife to your dear son."

So the farewells were ended. Anatól aided Nadiézhda to ascend into the carriage.

Just as he was about to get in himself, some one came by on the narrow, grass-grown sidewalk.

He stood still—the dark form also stopped.

"Good-by, Anatól," said a sad and weary voice. "Try to forgive me, and may good luck go with you."

This was the voice of Anastásia Aleksándrovna; this face, palely shimmering through the deep gloom, was Anastásia Aleksándrovna's face.

"Tóssia—come!" said Nadiézhda in a voice which instinctive anger tensed.

"*Proshchdetè!*" growled Anatól, turning abruptly.

"*Proshchdetè!*" called all the family in chorus, while silent, wrapped in the gloom, stood the tall figure of Anastásia Aleksándrovna, from whom all the Malinóffsky family instinctively grouped themselves apart.

The driver cracked his whip, the carriage jangled off and disappeared in the darkness.

The Malinóffsky family turned silently, Ekaterína still weeping, and went up the long path to the house.

The solitary figure stood there like a statue, gazing off into the darkness.

Suddenly she flung herself down on the low wooden bench before the gate; and her face buried in her hands, she began to sob, long, convulsive sobs, which she tried to stifle—but vainly. Within, and behind the silent rows of villas, which stood like dark sentinels in the black shadow, the fierce wolf-dogs set up a wild barking.

From the foliage of the front courtyard the gaunt, melancholy dog whom Fate had made an outcast, sneaked out and slunk close to the shaking form, sniffing curiously—then, as she made a sudden movement, it shied away, suspicious, its tail between its legs.

Anastásia rose at last, and slowly and wearily went upward to the Sanatorium, vanishing into the darkness like a ghost. Strange emotions were in her soul, for she had just seen a strong man die.

CHAPTER XIX

I

THE day following the death of Makedónsky dawned as golden bright and clear as though tragedy and death were things unknown.

Eléna felt so wretchedly unhappy she could not get up, and stayed all the morning in bed, scarcely touching the hot tea and rolls which the faithful and tremulous Ekaterína brought her with her own hands.

She herself had wept all night; her mild soft gaze was blurred, like objects that we see through water, yet she kept up and tended Eléna (Borís Vladímírovich had told her of Makedónsky) as though she were a little child.

Dr. Malinóffsky had arisen at the dawn, made tea on his little alcohol lamp in the study, and now sat on the Sanatorium terrace reading the learned medical work in page proofs which he was editing.

And life began again—the life of the Sanatorium—the outer life. But the inner life had received like a die the impress of new events; like a mystic river it flowed on in deep, divergent channels, and only the sorrowful eyes and ravaged faces showed exteriorly how profoundly the iron had entered into the souls.

2

At four o'clock the next afternoon Dr. Malinóffsky bore to Ekaterína's room the Yúzhny Krái, pointed to an article which he had marked in red, and left the room without a word. Ekaterína wiped her eyes, polished the lenses of her gold spectacles, read the article tremulously and tearfully, and brought it up to Eléna. Eléna, who had stayed in bed all day, propped herself up upon her pillows, had Aniúta open the window hangings, and read the two full columns from beginning to end quite silently.

The article was heavily featured in large type:

SUICIDE OF MAKEDÓNSKY

HERO OF PORT ARTHUR SHOOTS HIMSELF IN A SOUTHERN
KURORT

BRILLIANT OFFICER OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S GUARDS
KEEPS SECRET PACT

MEMBER OF A SUICIDE CLUB IN 'PETER'
STARTLING DISCLOSURES

The article gave in full detail the "facts" of Makedónsky's death. Makedónsky had shot himself the day before; his death had occurred at midnight of the same day. Graf Lyóff Sergiévich Petróffsky, a rich and sybaritic nobleman of Peter, and a close friend of Makedónsky, had asserted, after hearing in Khárkoff of Makedónsky's death, that that brilliant officer had belonged secretly for years to a suicide club, whose existence was well known among the circles in which Makedónsky had moved; a club which had always been exclusive, numbering amongst its members the descendants of some of the richest and most powerful families of Russia.

Petróffsky, it appeared, had stated that no fewer than twenty-two persons of both sexes, members of this society, had died in some manner chosen by themselves, within the past five years.

The object of this society, had explained Petróffsky, was to give expression to the one great fact which the organization, as all others of similar kind, accepted as its fixed, immutable Credo, its divinely inspired Revelation.

This fact, added Petróffsky, may be summed up thus. Life in Russia, for Russians, is not worth living. Our country is disorganized, undermined by smoldering fires. Our social life is a vicious circle. We have no ideals and no hopes. Life is absurd. Death is a release.

These ideas, asserted Count Petróffsky, had been reiterated by Makedónsky in a letter received in Petersburg after Makedónsky's last visit there. From this letter it was plain and manifest that Makedónsky had determined, for reasons which he did not state, that the time was drawing near for him to fulfill the obligation of the Society. His closest friends had waited with intense interest for the rest. The news of his death, occurring so obscurely and without éclat, had been at first surprising; but

Petróffsky thought that this mode of transition had been peculiarly characteristic of Colonel Makedónsky. In the vast solitude of the Russian steppe, beneath the blue of a South Russian sky, he had elected to end his life; to die a lonely, poetic and dramatic death.

It was said that there had been some scandal about an actress—a certain Anastásia Aleksándrovna, whom Makedónsky had brought back with him from Siberia, and whom he called his wife, and a young Army physician, whose father was a well-known editor of medical books and Director of a large Sanatorium at Slaviánsk, where, by a curious coincidence, Makedónsky had elected to die by his own hand. That Makedónsky, however, had committed suicide was beyond any question, as he had left a paper written in his own handwriting and signed in his own name, before witnesses, which stated that that had been his specific purpose. The death of Makedónsky, in any case, was a public calamity, and the manner of it a powerfully eloquent intimation of the state into which the Russian people had fallen, etc., etc., etc. (The paper that published this article, it need scarcely be added, was suspended the following day, and the editor heavily fined. Other papers spoke discreetly of Makedónsky's reputed membership in a suicide club in the form of a hypothesis.)

3

Slaviánsk was in a tumult. Gossip, with its tongues of flame, went around the small provincial Lake town like wild-fire. The Malinóffskys remained secluded. Ekaterína Ivánovna spent most of her days in tears; Eléna went out only at night. Only Dr. Malinóffsky, stern and unapproachable, received his patients and attended to his affairs with unalterable impassivity.

One person who did *not* keep out of public view was Anastásia Aleksándrovna. She went each day to the Park, dressed elaborately in scarlet or baby-blue, sat on some bench, listening to the music, enjoying, apparently, the curious glances and comments, the flood of gossip that ran around the semicircle like a foaming wave.

Already she had made the acquaintance of Barátóff—a young actor who had played at the Kursal the night of the Charity Ball, and who had stayed on to take the waters. Many eyes followed the progress of this new flirtation, and public condemnation did not spare her. But of this she had no heed.

4

The affair of Anátol, Anastásia and Makedónsky was not the only choice morsel of gossip that set Slaviánsk agog.

The fact that Tatárinoff had shot Stephen Earle had not yet percolated. It was said definitely, however, that Liúba Yermoláeva was responsible for his attempt at self-destruction; that he had been desperately in love with her, and badly treated; that Liúba had thrown over the interesting and vainly-imploing foreigner for the Prince, whose relation to her had long been known, at the latter's imperious and inexorable behest. Earle, driven to despair, had shot himself on Liúbóff Sergiévna's very doorstep. Both Madame Babróva and the Prince were now absent from Slaviánsk; and it was rumored that they had left together and had gone abroad. As for the American, he lay at the point of death.

With him, common report also associated the name of Eléna Borisovna, who, it was said, had now gone to the sick man's bedside to do vigil with the nurse, with whom in alternation she was constantly in attendance, under the direct supervision of her own father, carrying out his instructions to the letter, aiding him powerfully, as only a woman can, in the almost hopeless struggle which the stricken man was making for his life.

Another sweet and savory item Slaviánsk rolled beneath its delighted tongue. (Never before had the little Kurort had such a wealth of interesting gossip to retail, comment, gloss and judge upon!)

Item: the Zémsky Nachálnik had been moved quite ill from the Sanatorium at dead of night; he was now in the small hospital of the nearby City of Slaviánsk, down with a virulent attack of typhoid; his wife, the Psychopátka, had fled, but had returned on hearing of his removal; she had had sheets soaked in carbolic hung in her room; she herself exhaled the same penetrating odor as she went around, more silent, more unnatural and uncanny than ever.

Evgénia Yermoláevna, who had had a serious heart attack following the American's attempt at suicide, had shown signs of improvement.

Anna Isáevna had suffered a complete nervous breakdown. It was said that her mind had become affected. She was now under the close and careful attention of Dr. Malinóffsky. Her father, whose estate was in the Caucasus, had been sent for.

M. de Marly was in France seeking a divorce from his wife, who made no effort to conceal it.

And lastly the Prokurór had announced publicly that he also would secure a divorce from his wife on the ground of incompatibility. It was assumed that she would fight, for the sake of the child.

5

The long, hot days passed.

One evening (though it was September, the day and evening had been warm), the Malinóffsky family sat out upon the balcony of the Sanatorium.

Old Dr. Malinóffsky was as patriarchal and silent as he was wont; Ekaterína Ivánovna, smaller and more weazened, as it seemed, than ever. Present also were Eléna, Sónia, and no less a personage than Evgénia Yermoláevna. The latter's heart was very sick, and permanently so; but Dr. Malinóffsky allowed her to sit for a short time every evening in the open air.

The family was unusually silent. Gloom had descended upon their spirits. Each wrapped in his inner world, they spoke briefly and mechanically, or not at all.

Eléna, above all, gave clear and unmistakable signs of depression. Dressed in a loose gown of blue Chinese silk, she sat on the broad ledge of the balustrade, with drooping head and pensive, downcast eyes, like a beautiful statue of Sorrow, gazing off into the dim-lit darkness of the path that led to the gate.

"How is Anna Isáevna to-day, Borís?" asked Sónia, the only one of the family who dared to speak to Dr. Malinóffsky at all, when he was in his gloomiest mood.

"Bad!" he growled, in his deep chest tones, not even looking at her.

"Has there been no improvement?"

"No!" came again the deep, laconic answer.

"When will her father come?"

"I know not!"

"He wrote that he was unable to leave the Caucasus at the present moment; and that in any case it was better that we should keep her here and that Papa should care for her," interposed Ekaterína.

"It is too great a responsibility." This from Mússia. "Mária Aleksiévna says that she sobs all night long. She said that if it continues she will have to move."

"She is an *angel* in comparison with the Prokurór!" observed

Ekaterína, emitting a cloud of pungent smoke. "If anything, he is madder than poor Anna Isáevna!"

Evgénia snorted.

"Mad? The man ought to be put in a straitjacket! Volódia told me he is worse than ever at meal times!"

"Poor papa has to bear the brunt of it!" Eléna stroked her father's arm affectionately.

"Papa? How about me?" demanded Mússia sharply. "I sit in front of him now, and spend more of my time in quarreling than I do in eating."

"Why dost thou take up his talk?" asked Dr. Malinóffsky, turning on her suddenly, with flashing eyes. "Do as I do! Let him talk. Talk harms no one."

"I am not a philosopher, like thee!" rejoined Mússia, in her sharp way. "The man gets on my nerves. He is absolutely out of his mind! His actions at table are those of a raving lunatic—howling, screaming, gesturing, interrupting everybody, quarreling with everybody, making the most extravagant statements; and when any one contradicts him, he almost foams at the mouth! He actually tried to prove to me yesterday that Speránsky was the Prime Minister under Alexander Second.

"And when he started to argue, I cut him short, and went on talking with the Inspector; then in the evening, when I came in to dinner, I brought in the volume of Karámzin's history with the page turned down, opened it, and passed it over to him, saying:

"'Now, Gospodín Prokurór, kindly oblige me by proving to me by Karámzin that Speránsky was under Alexander II?'"

"He took the book and turned green. '*Proklídtia!*' says he; '*Proklídtia!*' looking me up and down."

"And papa's mustache quivered," added Eléna, with a slight trace of her old humor.

"His poor wife!" commented Sónia. "I pity her! I was coming across the Park the day before yesterday, and from afar I saw them together. He was quarreling with her, shouting and howling at the top of his voice. 'I won't,' he was screaming. I could hear it from the other path, 'I won't, you can't make me! I would rather die than go on living with you! You bore me to death, you chain me, you *impríuhon* me!' And the poor thing was trying to pacify him, hushing him, half-weeping, while he howled. And suddenly if he didn't make a leap into the shrubbery, and run across the Park like a madman. Actually took to his heels!"

"I have no pity for her," declared Evgénia, lower than usual, but still quite able to compete with Sónia. "Why does she take up with such a neurasthenic? And why, after she has him, does she cling to him? It passes *me!*"

"It is the fault of the women!" interjected Dr. Malinóffsky irascibly, his eyes flashing, as always in the bosom of his family. "Bad judgment and continued bad judgment. No woman ever made a bad man good."

"It is for his child, Boris," explained Ekaterína timidly. "She does not wish the poor, pathetic little thing to grow up without a father—you can't blame her for that."

"*Spasibo*" (Thank you) "for such a father!" boomed Evgénia.

"Poor Natália Mikháilovna!" remarked Ekaterína in her mild tones. "She is almost distracted. She heard through Klara Petróvna that her husband had told Olga Nikoláevna he had already written to his *továrishch*" (Assistant) "in Kharkoff to begin proceedings for a divorce. I am sure the poor woman spends her whole nights crying."

"Simply a fool!" vociferated Evgénia, yet not unkindly. As a matter of fact, she had always had a liking for the wife of the Prokurór, whom she considered intelligent and badly treated.

A silence fell.

"Why did that little Jewess, Anna Isaévna, break down so suddenly?" reverted Evgénia. "I always thought she was nervous and high-strung, but she seemed to get along well enough; she was bathing regularly every day; I thought till about the middle of July that she was looking pretty well."

"And so she was," confirmed Ekaterína. "And in *my* opinion, she would be well to-day if a certain person had not come to Slaviánsk, and utterly destroyed the poor creature's peace of mind!"

Ekaterína's mild eyes flashed as she glanced through the lenses of her big round spectacles at Eléna's gleaming gaze and indignant expression of reproach.

"Well—why *shouldn't* I say it?" she burst out aggressively. "Thou knowest as well as I do that that American was to that weak, half-hysterical, high-strung creature little better than an evil genius, and led her on with his capricious, romantic manners; and then, when he had won her affection and perhaps even her love, he 'threw' her like an old shoe, and hurt her feelings cruelly in the bargain."

"How did he hurt her feelings?" retorted Eléna incredulously,

and not without a touch of hardness. "She simply threw herself at his head; it was no fault of his!"

"Indeed!" mocked Ekaterína, with unexpected and unusual sharpness. "Much *thou* knowest about it! There are none so blind as those that have no eyes to see. Perhaps it was thou who was sitting on the Sanatorium steps with Papa the night of the ball—when she came up the steps deathly pale, and her poor little Oriental face all stained with tears and her eyes like those of a gazelle stabbed to the heart by some cruel hunter's knife!"

"Mama!" cried Eléna suddenly, interrupting her, as Ekaterína, carried away by her own rhetoric, started to say more. "It is ridiculous, to compare poor Stephen Earle to a hunter, and worse than ridiculous to say that he is cruel. Why, he would not hurt a fly!"

"Indeed!" mocked her mother again perversely. "Perhaps it was *thou* who went up to Anna Isáevna's room and soothed her when she lay heart-broken, sobbing on her bed—and *thou* whom she told that the American had hurt her feelings—broken her heart—and she didn't want to live—and she was unhappy—unhappy!—poor creature!"

"If he did hurt her feelings!" flashed back Eléna, a hysterical trembling in her usually firm voice, "it was probably done at the instigation or under the influence of—some one else," she ended lamely, suddenly realizing Evgénia Vermoláevna's presence. "And anyway," she went on in a suddenly choked voice, "I don't think it's fair or kind to blame and accuse a man who is lying at death's door—a man who——"

She suddenly and quite unexpectedly burst into tears, rose hastily and went into the house.

6

"What's come over our Eléna of late?" asked Evgénia, in a voice which, for her, was distinctly soft; "the girl isn't herself at all."

"Nerves!" rasped Sónia, lighting another cigarette.

"None of us are ourselves," sighed Ekaterína sadly. "All this suicide, and death, and sickness, and unhappiness around us; it's enough to break anybody down. Don't forget that Eléna and Tóssia adored each other, and that she must have suffered as much as I, his mother, when he was dismissed from the Army and when——" She stopped abruptly.

"It must have been a great strain on her!" observed Evgénia thoughtfully. "And that American, too, she seems to think a great deal of him?"

"Yes," rejoined Ekaterína immediately, her soft eyes flashing again. "And I don't like to see it, I tell you plainly, Evgénia Yermoláevna. Of course, as she said herself, the man is at the point of death. Is that really so, Boris?"

"He is sick," admitted Dr. Malinóffsky, with laconic impassivity.

"And of course, I don't want to be unkind or ungenerous; but I have a feeling that he is a trouble-maker; one of those men who are neither good nor bad; who like women and who know how to please them with all their poetry and foreign ways, and romantic manners. Nadiézhda Petróvna told me with her own lips that he had made trouble between her and Tóssia; and that perhaps this terrible disaster would never have happened if Tóssia hadn't been thrown alone, without a friend for weeks——"

"Listen, Kátia!" Dr. Malinóffsky turned on Ekaterína suddenly, with his flashing gaze. "Thou knowest the proverb, 'What will be, will be?'"

"Yes," admitted Ekaterína, intimidated in advance.

"Then stop thy foolish chatter," he growled despotically.

"It may be foolish," burst out Ekaterína with sudden, unexpected anger, "or it may not be foolish. I dislike that American and I distrust him, and my 'chatter,' as thou callest it, may be just as wise as thy continual silence, which sees all kinds of things going on around us, and makes thee keep all thy thoughts within thyself!"

And rising with great dignity to all her diminutive stature, she got up in her turn, and followed her daughter into the house.

Stern and imperturbable as usual, Dr. Malinóffsky made no comment.

"Boris Vladímirovich, do you think that American has any chance of recovery?" asked Evgénia Yermoláevna point-blank, after a moment's silence.

"Hard to say," he growled, more communicatively than before; to him both Evgénia and Sónia were as men, with whom he could talk freely. (Women, as such, he heartily despised.) "He has a bad wound—it's the left lung. It affects his breathing. He is sicker than you were a month ago."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Sónia, with real commiseration—(Sónia had kindness in her) "to come so far, for such an end!"

Evgénia looked up at Sónia from the lower step.

"If it is the end," she declared, her strong face, blue and decomposed with her malady, depicting an unusual gravity, the gravity that had come to her since her narrow escape from death—"one thing, at least, I know, and of that you, Sónia Ivánovna, and you, Boris Vladímirovich, are my witnesses, and that is, though his death may be my daughter's fault, it is not mine. God knows it is not mine! Six weeks ago I told him at the Sanatorium—it was at breakfast; he was just leaving when I sat down to table. No one else was there; we were alone. 'Beware of my daughter, *Amerikánets*,' I told him, 'Beware of Liúba; she will bring you only ruin and disaster!'"

"And what did he answer?" asked Sónia, who had taken her cigarette from her mouth. Evgénia made the habitual Russian gesture, hand raised, then swept downward for a reply.

"Mad over her!" she answered, after a moment. "Stark, staring mad, as they all were ever since she was a little girl at school. Don't I know? Mad as them all, the whole, long procession of them. How many lovers has she had, and how many has she driven to despair?"

"And I—what could I do? What was I myself, may God forgive me, miserable sinner, when I was of her age? No, no! What's bred in the bone will out in the flesh, I suppose. How could I change her from what she is? Facts are facts, and we must face them. And often I felt sorry for some nice young fellow whom I liked, just as I felt sorry for this American, and then I would warn him——"

Again the hopeless, comprehensive gesture.

"Of course it did no good. Mad! Stark, staring mad, as all the women were mad over her father. As mad as I, yes I, the old war-horse Evgénia, was mad over him, and bitterly he made me rue the day before I saw him in his coffin, as handsome as a cold, dead god! Ah, *Góspodi*! life is like that—for some of us, at least!"

"We all have our troubles," began Sónia; but Dr. Malinóffsky was already speaking.

"Why for some, Evgénia?" he growled, in his deep bass, "why not for all? Do you think that *you* are any exception? Look around you! What do you see? Do you see any happiness?" (He made a fierce gesture of nauseated disgust.) "*Akh*, Russia!"

"Twenty years ago, Evgénia Yermoláevna," he continued after a long silence—"I was betrayed and ruined by a man whom I trusted like my own brother. My whole fortune went into the

abyss. Twenty years ago," he repeated, nodding his white beard and bare, dome-like head wearily up and down. "And I have paid—paid every cent. Not a kopek do I owe those who suffered through me!"

"To say nothing of that man's widow and children, whom you have maintained and educated ever since," interrupted Sónia.

"Be silent!" commanded Dr. Malinóffsky, in his fierce, despotic way. "Of that there is no need of speech. I was only showing you, Evgénia, that we all have our trials. Do you think Life for Ekaterína Ivánovna and myself has been a bed of roses?"

"Surely not," admitted Evgénia thoughtfully, nodding her head slowly up and down.

"And look around you, look at my daughter Mússia here, the bitter sorrow that marriage brought her—look at my son Anatól, the wreck he has made of *his* life; look at the Prokurór's wife; look at Mária Aleksiéevna——"

He stopped suddenly, remembering something.

"How is her husband, the Zémsky Nachálnik, by the way?" asked Evgénia, who knew that the Psychopátka's husband had been removed from the Sanatorium in a raging fever.

Dr. Malinóffsky slowly fumbled in his pocket, found, withdrew and unfolded a small crumpled piece of paper.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "this came for me when I was going in to supper. I did not wish to show it to Kátia just now; she takes things so seriously."

He passed it to Sónia; she took it, read quickly, uttered an exclamation, and passed it back to him; he passed it on to Evgénia, who read it silently.

The message—it was a telegram—read as follows:

Slaviánsky Uézdny Góspital, 7 a.m. Zémsky Nachálnik died of typhoid here early in the morning—telegraph instructions.

(Signed) Superintendent.

Wearily Evgénia handed back the paper.

"Another gone," she commented, in her new, grave voice. "They all go. Soon we shall go, Borís, and the world will forget we ever lived——"

"Aye," muttered Dr. Malinóffsky, his massive head falling on his breast, which his white beard covered. "The world will forget we ever lived."

He raised his arms suddenly upward to the moon-lit sky, strewn with myriads of brilliant stars.

"Unjust, unjust!" he muttered, gazing with volcanic rage at the moon, suspended like a giant ball of silver light in empty space.

"Did I not say long ago," Evgénia recalled sadly, looking in her turn at the rift of moon and starlit sky visible between the double line of giant oaks that bordered the *ddcha* path—"Did I not ask, and you all thought it was a joke, 'what kind of idiot is up there anyway, mismanaging the world?'"

CHAPTER XX

I

OCTOBER had come.

Slaviánsk was a cold and windy desert. Summer, like the orchestra, had taken flight, and autumn had come to take her place.

Only a few families still remained to populate the desert.

Dáchniki . . .

Summer residents. Most of them had fled. And those in whom we are most interested, they, too, will soon take flight.

2

Several of those left behind in the almost depopulated Lake Town were balancing the summer's bizarre account.

The Yermoláeffs were balancing them most assiduously, real accounts, these! Evgénia had made ten thousand rubles, loaned Volódia a thousand, which that accursed dog and swine (*Tíshè, mat!*) had never dreamed of repaying, and had seven thousand net, which went to swell her already fabulous deposits in the Khárkoffsky Rússko-Asiátski Bank.¹

Volódia had spent the one thousand, as well as most of his regular income, in drink, card-playing and generally riotous living; he intended, consequently, to live for the winter with his mother-in Khárkoff (at her expense, of course), and retrench.

Liúba Yermoláeva, in a fashionable Paris hotel, installed in a luxurious suite of rooms which Prince Tatárinoff visited daily, presumably had her own accounts to settle.

Natália Mikháilovna, the Prokurór's wife, had *her* soul's books to balance. And curiously enough it was not her account which came out most unfavorably. Of this something was known or divined by Eléna, who had had a long talk with her one cold evening in the latter's room; Natália Mikháilovna had invited Eléna to spend a quiet hour with her after dinner, the Prokurór having permanently returned to Khárkoff.

¹The Russo-Asiatic Bank of Khárkoff.

It was about eight o'clock. Little Volódia had been put to bed by his peasant-nurse in the neighboring room. It was very still in the now almost empty Sanatorium, where Natália had elected to stay after her husband's definite announcement that he would return permanently to Khárkoff. (Her mother had long before returned to her home in Moscow.) Only the wood crackling in the center of the high, white porcelain stove (what the Germans call a *Kakelofen*) broke the deep silence which lay like a velvet garment all around.

They had chatted a little, and now had fallen silent, each lost in her own dreams. The Prokurór's wife, who was of a chilly tendency, sat quite near and directly facing the *piéchka* (stove), the small brass door of which she had opened, staring into the red and crackling flame.

"I suppose you will soon be going back to Khárkoff now?" asked Eléna, after a long silence.

Natália Mikháilovna looked up, and fixed on Eléna her dreamy, melancholy gaze.

"I shall be leaving soon, but I am not going to Khárkoff at all."

"Not going back to Khárkoff?" exclaimed Eléna in surprise.

"No. I am going to Mama in Moscow."

"For a visit, you mean?"

"No," replied Natália Mikháilovna firmly; "for good."

"For good?"

"Yes. I may as well tell you. Volódia and I have agreed to part."

"Oh!" Eléna spoke rather blankly, somewhat at a loss.

"Yes. I suppose you are surprised to hear this. You know how I have clung to him all along. But always in my heart I knew it couldn't be permanent. Volódia—poor boy—was mad over women, and I knew that some day some clever one would get hold of him, and that that would be the end of *me*! Well, you see, it happened."

"Another woman——"

"Yes. That Nina, with her singing, and her fine dresses and perfumery. She was after him all summer. I struggled, but it was all no use. We can't overcome Fate. If it hadn't been she, it would have been another; that actress, for instance, Anastásia Aleksándrovna, poor thing. She seems to be quite changed. Did you notice it?"

"Yes. She is very strange. She sits for hours in her room, staring out over the terrace at the trees. She is always in a

dream, and when you speak to her, she answers like a little child."

"Poor thing! Perhaps she's happier thus. I'm sure if I could forget everything, I would be happier than I am now. Volódia was perfectly infatuated with her, too: do you remember how they used to stare at each other during dinner? But she, poor child, was simply silly, and that Nina was both clever and unscrupulous. For weeks Volódia had been begging me to consent to a divorce, which he, being in a government position, you know, can easily bring about, so that he could marry her."

"Oh, how *infamous!*"

"Yes. I don't know," responded Natália wearily. "He was very tired of me, I admit. I tried to cure him; he was a nervous wreck when I married him, a wreck, and I did help him, I know. I am afraid things will be bad for him, but he wants excitement, love, passion——"

"So now," she added, a tremor in her thin, clear voice, "I am a widow, or what comes to about the same; a woman separated from her husband, and soon to be divorced. Volódia has already filed the papers, so he wrote me recently from the Prokurór's offices at Khárkoff, on the ground of 'insurmountable aversion,' if you please."

"Poor Natália Mikháilovna!" Eléna leaned over and caressed her thin hand with compassion and affection, for there had always been something in the Prokurór's wife that she had liked. "I am sure you deserve a better fate."

"Don't pity me!" cried Natália Mikháilovna piteously, her eyes suddenly filled with tears, which she wiped away slowly with her handkerchief. "I want to be brave, and I can't be when I think of myself. It's only when I think of my boy that I feel not only no sorrow, but even glad. Of course it's a terrible thing for a child to be without a father, but there are things even worse than that. I can bring my darling boy up to love and respect his father, which he couldn't do if Volódia and I went on together. And I feel that I have a mission and a responsibility to my child; and that helps me wonderfully. As for Volódia, I wrote him the other day that if he is ever very unhappy, or broken in health, he must come to me, and I will try to help him."

"And what did he answer?" asked Eléna curiously.

"He did not answer," responded Natália, with a sigh.

Again the silence fell between them, as they listened to the crackling of the flames.

"Life is so strange," continued Eléna, after a pause. "When

I think of my brother, Anatól, and of Makedónsky lying in his grave, and of Anastásia, and of Stephen—Stephen Earle, I mean——”

“He is nearly well, is he not?” asked Natália mechanically, as Eléna broke off abruptly.

“Yes. Papa told me he can go out now in a few days. He has been chafing terribly at all this indoor life.”

“I suppose he will soon be leaving, too,” observed Natália.

“Yes.” In Eléna’s clear voice there was an intonation of depression. “I think he intends to go back to his own country.”

“To America? It seems so far away.”

“Yes, so very far. He will soon forget Slaviánsk.”

Natália Mikháilovna looked up sharply. But Eléna was staring fixedly into the very heart of the scarlet, licking tongues of flame.

CHAPTER XXI

I

OUT again, out under the vast and open sky, after seven weeks' confinement in a close and stuffy room. Breathing in cold air in deep, wine-like draughts; throwing back his head to gaze up at the autumnal sky; swinging his arms; accelerating his pace; feeling his heart pound again, and the blood course swiftly through his veins.

Eléna had proposed accompanying Earle on his first excursion, but he had preferred to be alone.

So now he was striding along, all by himself, in the direction of the Eastern steppe, whence the sun, a big red ball high over the gray horizon line, sent forth a cold but brilliant luminance, lighting up the flat and boundless steppe in a clear, sharp light.

2

As the gleam and glitter of the coldly flowing lake strike on his eyes through bare and leafless branches, he turns off abruptly to the right. Now he is in the Grove. For a few moments he walks; then stops short and gazes before him.

Where there had been green rustling foliage, there was now a network of dry and withered branches, grinding together, as the wind blew through them; the tree-trunks, like white sentries, stood tall and meager; specters, stripped bare and desolate, shorn of all their pristine splendor, which lay on the cold ground, be-draggled, rotting slowly away in the deep mournfulness of the autumn wood, where Nature gasped in her last agony before the advent of her winter-death. He suddenly remembered Makedónsky. Makedónsky, who now lay six feet beneath the earth, rotting—he too—in the foul embrace of dissolution.

And then he thought of the Prince, who had almost sent his own soul crashing into Annihilation. And lastly he thought of Liúba.

Toward them he felt no anger.

Slowly, with bowed head, he went at last upon his way.

And now he passed through the high wooden arch that led into the Park, the wind-swept, abandoned Park; whence all the warmth, the rustling green, the sparkle of beautiful eyes, the filmy beauty of summer gowns, the motley of the Russian throng, its officers, landed proprietors, nurses, students, peasants, Jews and Armenians, had fled; where the only music was that made by the autumn violins.

3

He sank upon the bench, and covered his face with his hands. He did not even look up when some one came and sat beside him; took his hand and caressed it silently.

And Eléna, her eyes filled with a suspicious moisture, gazed down at him with a soft and brooding gaze.

"Don't weep, Stephen!"

He raised his face, and dashed away the tears.

"It's a long way I've come, Eléna," he muttered. "I feel as though this summer had lasted a thousand years."

"It's your sickness, poor boy." Eléna stroked his hand compassionately. "All the excitement, and your wound; and those long weeks in your room, it must seem like a nightmare. I know how you must feel."

"It isn't that." He gazed straight before him, his brow knit, his mouth set. "It's something else. I hardly know what it is myself. Something has happened, something has gone out of me. Some life principle, some ultimate delusion—I don't know what it is."

He gazed at her silently, thinking his own thoughts, and she gazed back at him, noting with a pang the pallor of his face.

"Stephen," she began suddenly. "Will you tell me something? If I knew, it might help me to understand how you feel."

"Anything you wish."

"I warn you that my question is indiscreet." She smiled faintly.

"*Nichevò!*"¹ he muttered, his gaze fixed far away, where the rippling waters of the lake gleamed chilly through the vistaed path that ran transversely into the Promenade.

"Do you love Liúba still?"

He cast at her a swift, astonished gaze, then laughed harshly.

"Love Liúba still? No! Did I ever really love her?"

¹ It makes no difference.

Eléna made no reply. After a moment she rose.

"I must be going home now." She cast at him a quick glance. "Forgive me for following you. Will you come back with me, or do you prefer to continue your walk alone?"

"I think I'll stay here a while. I am rather tired, I think."

"You mustn't overdo," she said solicitously, her eyes anxious as she noted again his paleness. "You are still weak, you know. Will you come home soon? I forgot to tell you. Papa wants you to live with us until we go away. Now that the nurse has been sent away, you are absolutely alone where you are now."

"All the better," replied Earle ungraciously. "Solitude is the best thing for me. I am nothing but a beastly bore, anyway——"

"No, no," she protested. "You do make us feel bad, we feel so sorry for you!"

Her voice trembled a little.

"*Do svidánia*," she called over her shoulder, in a voice that she tried to make animated and gay.

"*Do svidánia*." He did not even look up.

Eléna went up the path to the bleak, barred-up Kursal, turned to the right and disappeared.

4

Again he was alone.

"All very well for *her*. But I——"

He raised his face and gazed over at the lake where the water glittered.

"Oh, *Hell!*" he cried suddenly. "What a beastly mess I've made of my life!"

And yet in his heart he knew if he had it to do over again, he would not have done it any better than before.

He rose and went onward to the lake.

Standing on the high ground, he gazed down over the cold and level expanse, brilliantly white in the hard, bright sunshine, the million ripples flashing blindingly as the glare fell on them.

Seven weeks he had lost. Seven weeks of swimming. Seven weeks of life. And now it was autumn, and the swimming was over; was Life over too?

And an impulse and longing came upon him. Why should he not have one last swim, autumn and all?

He gazed around him. There was not a soul in sight. The

whole Park was deserted. Days might go by, and no one would enter now. His own presence there that day, and that of Eléna had been the merest accident.

Bracing himself backward, he cautiously made his way down the slope. Choosing a bush, the thickly growing branches of which afforded a shelter, he quickly undressed at the very edge of the cold, lapping waters.

Shivering in the cool autumn air, he waded in boldly.

"Br-r-r-!" how cold the water was!

And brrr! how much colder with every step! No half measures here; the muscles of his legs were already numbed.

And waist-deep, he threw up both his arms and plunged shallowly, head first, a second later bobbing up five or six feet ahead.

Ouf! But this water was freezing! It swept around him like a winding sheet in a grave, filled with deadly chill; lifeless, clammy; viscous with the floating scum and clusters of lake vegetation; the lake was left uncared-for now.

But a grim mood held his heart.

Boldly, braving the freezing waters, he struck off to the middle of the wide expanse.

5

When he recovered consciousness, he found himself in bed in a large and comfortable room.

"He is coming to," he heard some one say. "But he should see no one."

Then, from very weariness, he closed his eyes again and drowsed for what seemed an eternity; in reality it was scarcely five minutes.

The next time he woke, he could see better. All the Malinóffsky family stood around him, also Evgénia Yermoláevna.

"Nu, how do you feel?" asked Dr. Malinóffsky in his deep voice, bending over him.

"I—don't—know," he replied feebly. How hard it was to speak! Each word seemed to come from an enormous distance. "Have I been asleep?"

"Yes, quite sound!"

"Oh, Stephen!" cried a new voice, in which tears trembled. It was, yes, Eléna's voice.

And Eléna was kneeling by his bedside, and his hand, weak and nerveless, was in hers, and something hot and scalding fell upon it.

"Oh, Stephen! Oh, Stephen, how could you, how could you?"

"Sh!" commanded Dr. Malinóffsky sternly; then he spoke in an undertone; and all left the room, except himself.

"You had a narrow escape, my friend," said Dr. Malinóffsky, coming back to his bedside.

"I am very tired," he whispered; for he did not understand.

"Why did you go into that freezing lake? What an idiot!" boomed Evgénia. (Would they never get through talking?)

But he paid no attention; and again Time and Eternity wrapped him in an irrevocable tomb.

This time he did not awake for hours. It was again morning, and the sun shone brightly in across his room. For a long time he lay flat upon his back, gazing at the golden beams, dancing gaily on the high, lime-whitened ceiling. Then his gaze fell lower. In the corner by a high and somber *shkaf* (clothespress) stood a capacious leathern armchair. Across it, a mass of snowy lace and ruffles, lay a woman's chemisette. For a long time he gazed at it, wondering vaguely to whom it belonged, and in whose room he was.

A knock came at the door.

"Enter!" he called drowsily.

The door opened and Eléna came in, bearing a tray on which stood a silver coffee-pot, rolls and butter.

"Good morning," she greeted him cheerfully, as she put down the tray on a chair that stood by his bedside. An appetizing odor assailed his nostrils. He suddenly realized that he was very hungry.

"I have brought you some breakfast, Stephen," she announced, crossing over to the big armchair. She took up the lacy bit of lingerie with a little exclamation, and quickly hid it in the big closet, from whose opened doors a faint, sweet perfume emanated, and between which he caught a vision of snowy white.

Then she returned, poured him his coffee in a fragile porcelain cup, buttered his roll; spread a napkin on the edge of the bed, and passed him the cup and roll upon a plate. He ate with zest, and handed back his cup for more.

"*Khoróshi, kófel*!"¹ he murmured, biting into another roll. "Won't you have some yourself?"

"Thanks! I have already breakfasted. Do you know, monsieur, that it is ten o'clock?"

"Really? How many hours have I slept?"

"You almost slept for all eternity" replied Eléna solemnly.

¹ Good—the coffee.

He paused, a crisp bit of roll between his teeth.

"How so?"

"Don't you even remember, Stephen?" asked Eléna reproachfully.

"I remember that I went in swimming, but nothing more."

"Oh, Stephen! Don't you remember that you were nearly drowned?"

Earle gazed at her astounded, still holding the roll suspended.

"Nearly drowned? No? Was I?"

"Nearly. It wasn't *your* fault if you weren't! You were way up the lake, in the very center of the stream, a good quarter of a mile from the shore. The telegraph-operator, with the help of a peasant-woman, pulled you out; they found an old boat near the boat landing. In that freezing water, and your wound and weakness—you had already stopped swimming. Even Papa thought you were dead when they brought you back. . . . Stephen, Stephen, why did you do it?"

"I am beginning to remember," Earle gazed at her with a fixed glance, his blue eyes shining, deep and hollow, in his pale face. "I stopped swimming because I didn't care. I was tired of it all. I wanted to go to sleep. And rest—forever."

"You might at least have remembered your—your friends!" cried Eléna in a stifled voice.

She leaped to her feet and ran hastily out of the room.

He lay there for a long time, the taste of the fragrant coffee on his lips and in his throat, not even thinking: he was tired.

The door opened and Evgénia swept in, trailing her crimson wrapper majestically behind her.

"*Nu*," she accosted him in her stentorian tones. (Evgénia's health was improving.) "How goes the sick man this morning?"

"All right," assured Earle, wearily, "only a little tired."

"*Tired!*" roared Evgénia, "I should think you *would* be tired! This American just gets up after seven weeks with a bullet hole in his lung, and, not content with that, decides to swim a little matter of a thousand miles in water at 10 gradus temperature. You can thank your lucky stars, my friend, if there are any lucky stars, which I doubt, but I'm not an astrologer, that it was only cramp, and not the opening of that wound! If it had been, you wouldn't be alive to tell the tale, and that's all there is about it!"

He did not even try to answer, but turned over toward the wall, his head pillowed on his arm. And Evgénia's fierce but kindly gaze saw that he was not sleeping.

"That Amerikánets is in a bad way," remarked Evgénia at the dinner table that night, addressing herself to the family generally.

"*Why* is he in a bad way?" snorted Dr. Malinóffsky.

"I don't mean physically!" retorted Evgénia, whom the good Doctor could not intimidate. "It's his *soul* that's sick—not his body. The man's as strong muscularly as an ox!"

"His soul? Nonsense!" returned the Doctor, contemptuously. "There is no such thing as a sick soul! There is only a sick body, always a sick body, nothing else; sick soul? Nonsense! Nerves, nothing more!"

"There is no doubt that he tried to commit suicide," observed Sónia, in her energetic tones.

"Looks like it," roared Evgénia. "That accursed lake water must be as cold as the North Pole at this time of year!"

"Possible," admitted Dr. Malinóffsky. "This American, if I am not mistaken," he continued seriously, "is, and has been for a long time, nervously ill."

"Dost thou think that, Papa?" asked Eléna, speaking for the first time.

"Beyond all question," replied her Father. "As I diagnose his case—my knowledge of nervous diseases is, as you know, quite extensive. . . ."

"*Konyéchno!*" (Certainly!) cried the whole family in unison: they knew Papa's weakness.

"*Nu*, as I diagnose his case," continued the worthy Doctor gratified, as always, at a favorable reception of his didaxis,— "this American, first of all, is a rather fine specimen of a type much more frequent a hundred years ago than now—a pure romantic temperament. . . ."

"Too romantic altogether!" muttered Ekaterína sotto-voice to Sonia, "with all his love-affairs and shootings and suicides. . . ."

Dr. Malinóffsky turned on her with a frown. She immediately subsided, none the less convinced. She had an instinctive distrust of this foreign "pure-romantic," who, like "that actress," would yet bring bad luck.

"*Nu*," continued Dr. Malinóffsky judicially, after eyeing her severely for a full half-minute. "This means to the expert in nervous diseases a highly developed excitability of the imagination, which is itself a sign of very high intensity of nerve reaction."

People so endowed by Nature usually have what is called genius. This American is clearly of this type. Such natures are bound, inevitably, to be out of harmony with their environment, to be different from others, rebellious to restraint, not adapted to any conventional and accepted laws of life. Such men are individualists, and may become extremely dangerous to organized society——"

"I *knew* it!" cried Ekaterína triumphantly. "I knew he was that the minute I put my eyes on him!"

"Knew he was *what*?" demanded Dr. Malinóffsky fiercely.

"Why, dangerous to society!"

"You knew nothing of the kind!" her husband snapped at her, with gleaming eyes. "You, like most women, Kátia, are an auto-suggester; you take some perfectly blind and irrational prejudice as fact, and then calmly accept your own subjective hostility as objective proof that a man whom you dislike is bad."

"Perhaps I do!" retorted Ekaterína with vexation. "And you yourself—in what way are you superior to me? You have a prejudice to me because I am a woman, and you turn on me and attack me because I say exactly what you say yourself!"

"I was generalizing from a class!" replied Dr. Malinóffsky testily. "I never said that Earle was a danger to society. If you, with the rest of your sex, would pay some attention to what a man says, instead of jumping at conclusions, there might be more sense in your own remarks than actually exists at present."

Ekaterína was dumfounded. Hadn't her husband said that the American belonged to a pure-romantic type which was a menace to society? And didn't that mean Earle, admitting he was of this type? And yet her husband said he hadn't meant Earle. She looked at her sister, "made with the hand" again, and gave it up. Dr. Malinóffsky eyed her with his usual sternness until she had quite subsided.

"*Nu*, as I was saying," he continued his lecture. "Such men *may* become dangerous to society, but Earle is a man whose impulses are good. And he is hence a man who has been undeservedly very unhappy. His romantic desires, his feverish love of action and the picturesque, have made him a nomad. Expatriation, which his soul finds necessary to satisfy his inner nature, serves but to intensify his loneliness, his bitterness. He may yet end tragically——"

"Oh, Papa!" cried Eléna, her face quivering.

"Oh, *Papa!*" mimicked Ekaterína, with a viciousness rare in

her usual serene and placid nature—but for reasons of her own she was angry with her husband and Eléna. “A nice state of affairs when a modest, self-respecting girl is worried over a wild foreigner utterly dangerous to all society!”

“*Kdtia!*” cried Dr. Malinófsky, in a voice of thunder.

But Ekaterína, in high dudgeon, had already pushed her chair back and left the table, her blue eyes blazing through her round spectacles, lamenting with trembling, soundless lips the stupidity of husbands and daughters alike—she made no distinction between them; the latter has the former in their natures, a daughter is never wholly ours.

CHAPTER XXII

ELÉNA and Stephen sat in a Russian twilight in Earle's (which had been Eléna's) room. . . . Earle, as often since his slow convalescence, was weary toward evening, and Borís Vladímirovich had prescribed for him an hour's rest each day 'twixt dog and wolf.' . . . So there he lay on the well-padded leather couch which stood along one wall of Eléna's room, opposite the bed which was kept screened off throughout the day.

Eléna and Sófia Ivánovna, and Mússia had come to him after the afternoon tea; Sónia and Earle had smoked together; then Borís Vladímirovich had put in his head and ordered his patient to take his twilight rest. . . . So the three women had obediently risen and made to go; but Earle had begged them to remain.

"Stay thou with him, Eléna," suggested Sónia. . . . "I must go and write some letters for the evening mail."

"And I must work on my new translation from Sigurjonsson," declared Mússia.

So Eléna, at Earle's earnest solicitation, had remained. . . .

They sat there in silence while the twilight deepened, till the whole room was gray. . . .

"Stephen, what are you thinking of at this moment?" asked Eléna suddenly. Earle lay, his head propped on cushions, gazing straight upward to the ceiling; an odd expression shone in his eyes, and in the compressed contours of his lips.

"I was thinking of my past life, and the reason why I came abroad."

"To pluck red flowers."

He laughed. "You have a good memory. Well, it may interest you to know that I think I have plucked my last red flower this summer."

"I wonder," Eléna broke off. After a time she said:

"Liúba really loved you this summer, I think—as much as she is capable of loving any one, at least." She cast at him through the dusky pallor a long and brooding glance.

"You think so?"

"Yes, I really think so. Of course she——"

"When did you see her last?"

"Just before she left. . . . With Prince Tatárinoff. . . . I told you that, you remember."

"Yes. With her Prince," rejoined Earle, without bitterness.

"But tell me, how did you happen to go to see her?" he asked curiously. "You did not associate with her, I thought."

"I went to see her of my own accord."

"May I ask why?"

Eléna was silent for a moment.

"*Nu?*"

"I went to see her," she replied at last, reluctantly, "because I had certain things to say to her which I could not leave unsaid."

"What about?"

"Something about you."

"Something about me?"

"Yes. Something about you. It was just after you had been shot. I had been to see you—it hurt me so. And on my way back I passed her villa, and I suddenly became quite furious, and went up and insisted on seeing her."

"What did you say to her?"

"Never mind what. I think we understood each other clearly before I left. . . . I am not often angry, you know—but when I am——"

"But when you are——"

"Let us say no more. . . . Why should I reveal the bad side of my character to you?"

"You have proved yourself a devoted friend to me this summer!" declared Earle, in a moved voice.

"No more than you to me, Stephen. . . . I have valued your friendship, believe me!"

They were silent for a little, as the shadows deepened. . . .

"Eléna," said Earle suddenly.

"What?"

"Can you remember as far back as the night preceding my affair with Tatárinoff?"

"I think so—yes. Why?"

"Can you remember if you had that night at around midnight any impulse or thought of going to see Makedónsky?"

Eléna looked at him astounded—frightened.

"Stephen! Yes. How did you ever know? How could you know?"

"Tell me about your impulse first, and then I will explain."

"Why, I was lying in bed and thinking. . . . About Tóssia. . . . Naddi had blamed me, you know, for not pleading with Makedónsky on his behalf. And I couldn't! *You* can understand my reluctance, Stephen, if no one else can, I am sure."

"Yes. I understand."

"I knew you would. Because we are so much alike. . . . But Naddi didn't. . . . And I was feeling so bad about Tóssia. He had gone to Warsaw; they courtmartialled him, you know. . . . And that night, for the first time, I felt that I might be able to speak to Makedónsky after all. As I did, in fact, only two days later. . . .

"And as I lay there sleepless . . . we sometimes have mad impulses, you know, the thought came to me that I might seek him out in his villa . . . it was only eleven o'clock . . . and see him secretly; no one would know. . . . It was only a wild impulse, immediately suppressed. It would, of course, have been wrong and even unintelligent, from every point of view. But how did you ever know it? Is there some telepathy between your mind and mine?"

"It was not I who caught the message," he replied gravely.

"Who, then?"

"Mária Aleksíevna!"

"Mária Aleksíevna?"

"Yes . . . she rapped at my window near midnight . . . implored me to dress and go with her . . . dragged me out with her over the steppe. . . . When I demanded her destination—she said, 'Makedónsky!—Eléna has gone there!'

"I was impressed at first, but when she told me that it had come to her in a dream, I was quite disgusted and fell behind. . . . She ran ahead and disappeared in the darkness. . . . I walked on, thinking . . . and somehow decided to go by Makedónsky's villa at least. . . . It was dark in front, but behind there was a light. . . . I heard a woman's voice through the window . . . then I thought that the Psychopátka knew whereof she spoke."

"You thought I was in there—with Makedónsky!" exclaimed Eléna, astonished.

"Yes."

"And what did you do?"

"I determined to save you from him, and perhaps—forgive me—from yourself?"

"Oh, Stephen—!"

"I knocked. . . . Makedónsky came himself to the door. . . . I secured entrance only by diplomacy. . . . He offered me wine. . . . We became engrossed in a conversation which was interesting to both of us. . . . Suddenly Liúba Yermoláeva appeared from behind the hangings——"

"Liúba?"

"Liúba! She was angry at being kept imprisoned so long. It was a surprise to me, I assure you. . . . She made some pretext or other—I think she said that she had just arrived. . . . She was not at all concerned."

"Liúba never was! . . . She always considered herself a law unto herself."

"So she did on this occasion. . . . She went on drinking the glass of wine which my inopportune arrival had interrupted . . . asked Makedónsky to play, which he did wonderfully . . . then insisted on my escorting her home."

"But you did not quarrel with Makedónsky?"

"No. Strangely enough I could feel no animosity against him. . . . We . . . rather liked each other, you know——"

"I know," returned Eléna. "He spoke of you in the most affectionate terms the day after . . . the day following your . . . accident. . . . So even Liúba's treachery could not make you two hostile."

"No. That visit to Makedónsky, Eléna, proved fateful. I will not tell you how. It was the direct cause of my encounter with Tatárinoff. . . . And you see it can all be traced to the Psychopátka."

"Not to the Psychopátka; to me! You almost lost your life—through me! But how terrifying that Mária Aleksiévna could read my thoughts!"

"She was a very strange woman," Earle looked thoughtful. "She told me at Holy Mountain that her husband pushed her overboard, that he was plotting her death, to get her money."

"And he died first, after all! Papa suspects something, I think, since she left. But he won't tell any one, not even Mama."

"Your father is one of the gravest, most silent men I have ever known."

"He is also one of the noblest. But only we, of his family, know that. . . . For instance, the way in which he took poor Tóssia to his heart, after . . . after that terrible trouble. . . . And the way in which he treated Nástinka—Anastásia Aleksándrovna, I mean . . . with such a consideration! Mama, you know, never could bear her. Especially after. . . . She was

absolutely delighted when Nástinka went away with Barátóff. . . ."

"Barátóff? . . . What Barátóff?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you that! Barátóff was that young actor who came here for the summer with a company. We saw him play on the night of the ball, at the Kursal."

"Oh, yes, I remember. So she decided to go away with him?"

"Yes. Barátóff scraped an acquaintance with her in the Park, and persuaded her to join him, and to go back upon the stage. She was all excited when she came to tell us about it. And when she left, do you know, she was quite upset. She cried and kissed and embraced us all, even Mama, who for once did not run off to wash her face, and begged us all to forgive her. . . ."

"Poor girl. I am sure I wish her happiness."

Earle was silent for a moment, thinking.

"Tell me," he continued. "What has become of Anna Isáevna?"

"Anna Ezrin? . . . I suppose I ought to tell you that now. She lost her reason, and her father came from the Caucasus, and brought her home."

"Lost her reason?" he exclaimed, in shocked surprise, and a swift pang of remorse.

"Poor Anna Ezrin—poor little creature!" he murmured compassionately. "I am afraid I am responsible for at least part of her misfortune."

"It was Fate. She loved you. And she was weak—a hereditary taint—you must not blame yourself too much if you ill-treated her at all, which I doubt. And if you did, I am sure it was under the influence of Liúba. She is a frightful anti-Semite!"

"She told me once—it was at the Charity Ball—that Jews in Russia were utterly despised—that they were considered not even to be human beings!"

"By the Russian obscurantists! The best Russians are kind to them and pity them. The treatment of the Jews by our Government is one of Russia's shames!"

"Russia!" mused Earle. . . . "I always felt that things were grievously wrong in your big, mysterious country; and after this summer, I am sure of it."

"Do you know, Eléna, this has been the strangest summer I have ever passed?"

"Then it must have been very strange. You are always so frightfully reticent, yet from what little you have told me about

yourself, I can divine that you have had the strangest life of any one I ever knew."

"A strange summer!" mused Earle. "And the strangest of all is not my affair with Liúba, not even my drama with Tatárinoff—it is my friendship with you!"

"I am proud of it!" declared Eléna. She rose suddenly. "I think I must go now to dress for dinner."

He rose and faced her; then came toward her in the twilight.

"Eléna, do you remember that kiss you gave me——"

"The kiss you *took*, you mean. Let us not talk of that, Stephen!" replied Eléna gravely. "That was a long time ago. . . . I have forgotten it—and so must you!"

"*Have* you forgotten it, Eléna?" He reached out suddenly and took her hand.

A quiver came suddenly upon her face, which the dying day faintly illuminated.

"Stephen—don't! You must not! . . . I was ashamed of myself then, and I made a vow. . . . Stephen, I shall be angry—— You have no right——"

"You let me kiss you then!"

"Stephen—no!" She struggled to disengage herself from his encircling arm. "You are the most shameless and incorrigible man I have ever encountered! After all this tragedy. Stephen—*don't!*"

"You kissed me before!" he said in a hurt tone.

"What a man! He actually feels hurt! I *could* then, I suppose. . . . I can't now."

"But why?"

"Explain it any way you please. I *can't!*"

He released her suddenly.

"You do not care for me enough——"

"I offer you my friendship, Stephen. Friends—a man and woman, have no need to kiss."

"You will kiss a man, then, only if you love him?"

"Yes. Or at least only if he——"

Earle turned abruptly, and went to the palely glimmering window. Eléna hesitated a moment, then came and stood beside him.

"Stephen, have I hurt you?" she asked, putting her hand upon his sleeve as he stood there silent in the fading light. . . . "I wouldn't do that, you know. Not for *anything!* Stephen, speak to me."

"Why should I blame you? No woman need caress a man she does not love."

"Stephen, Stephen!" murmured Eléna, wistfully.

He turned and faced her.

"I envy the man who could make you love him!" he said, in a trembling voice. "He would find a big, deep, loyal soul——"

The little quiver flashed again across her face, stamped now with melancholy.

"Ah, Stephen, I too have had my dreams of love!"

"But Makedónsky——?"

"I do not think I loved him," Eléna answered wearily. . . .
"I have thought and thought—— It was some strange magnetism. But not love."

She stood there, tall and stately, her dark head leaning against the window, her gray eyes filled with shadows. The realization of her beauty, of her deep, pure soul, came over him. . . . Not for him! How strange that they could never be more than friends!

"I must go—Adieu!"

"Adieu," he responded sorrowfully.

He pressed the hand which she extended to him to his lips. . . . She did not protest; but turned and left the room. He listened to the sound of her garments, softly rustling as she walked.

The door closed softly behind her. . . . He threw himself of a sudden upon the leather couch, buried his face in the pillows.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE o'clock in the morning.

Earle had not left his room for three days.

To-morrow he was leaving Slaviánsk, leaving Russia itself. His trunk stood in a corner, packed to the brim.

He was facing a parting; and he had not the courage.

And so he would steal forth in the morning and send a porter from the station for his trunk. But to soften the apparent churlishness of his abrupt departure, he was writing to Eléna a note of farewell.

He bent over the table and began to write. Half a page, which he tore up. He began another, then broke off suddenly and raised his head. In the next room a woman's voice—*her voice*—quite unexpectedly had begun to sing a sad little Russian song; and curiously enough a song of parting; he could even catch some of the words through the thin dividing wall,—

*"Niet, tól'ko tot kto znal,
Svidénia zházhdú,
Paimyót kak ya straddl,
I kak ya strázhdú!"*¹

He took up another sheet of paper suddenly and wrote quickly a few words.

"Eléna. Forgive me, and—Good-by! S. E."

*Paimyót kak ya straddl
I kak ya strázhdú. . . .*

He rose, opened the door softly, crept on stealthy feet to the threshold of Eléna's room, put down the note at her door, and returned just as the sad little song died away.

¹No, only he who has known
The thirst to see again,
Will understand how I have suffered,
And how I suffer now.

Lying full length upon his bed, his hands tightly clasped behind his head, his eyes piercing the vibrating darkness that hung upon him like a pall, he thought of all his life and of what had been that summer, and of his future travels.

Later, as he lay there sleepless, he heard her door open, then softly close.

CHAPTER XXIV

I

ALL night he lay there, till the pale dawn filtered in through the cracks in the heavy baize curtains that veiled the windows. Just as he started to get up he heard Eléna's door open; heard her footsteps; heard a letter fall. No sooner had he heard the steps retreat and her door close than he rose, opened his own door, picked up the letter and retreated with his booty. Into bed he got again, tore open the envelope, addressed in a free and flowing hand, in purple ink,—

"Monsieur Stephen Earle——"

A trembling came over him as he read the first lines in Russian on the lilac-tinted, perfumed sheet,—

"Stephen, my friend. Do not, I beg of you, leave without seeing me; I must speak to you again.

"ELÉNA."

He looked down startled as he finished the letter. The bed was rattling and shaking as if it were a living thing that had the palsy. He was trembling violently.

His nerves, his accursed nerves! This summer had been too much for him. He must get away.

He arose, dressed hurriedly, closed and locked his trunk, put the label on it, took up his hat . . . his cane . . . stole softly to the door, opened it quickly and looked out. The corridor was deserted, the way was clear.

Quickly he stepped out and walked, soft-footed, toward the front hall. Just as he passed Eléna's door, it opened quickly and she stepped out, barring his path.

2

She was clad in a long peignoir, which shimmered like a sheath of gold; her dark hair fell all in confusion about her face, cascaded

upon her shoulders, fell below her knees. Her face was very pale, the lids heavy, both with tears shed and tears that must still be shed. He had never seen her so beautiful.

"Stephen!"

Her rich voice rang with deep reproach, her pale lips quivered.

"Oh, Stephen, when I *begged* you not to steal away!"

He felt dazed, unreal; the trembling had come on him again.

"I was going," he stammered— "I thought—thought it would be better—so——"

"You are not kind. You are not considerate. I asked you to see me before you went away."

She accused him, and he could find no defense for the instinct that led him to steal away thus, like a thief in the night.

"Stephen, do you think it was right, to go away without saying good-by to me, whom you will never see again? Could you do that and be happy afterwards, wherever you might be?"

"Happy?" He leaned back against the door and looked down upon her. "Do you think I could *ever* be happy—under any circumstances?"

"Would it make you happier to think that you had wounded a heart that understood your own?"

"The parting was painful to me," he pleaded in extenuation. "It was painful! I suffered. I thought it best to go, to write to you."

"Do you still think that; can you swear to me that you did not wish to see me for the last time, did not wish to bid me farewell?"

And now she was offended; her pale cheeks were flushed; her deep gray eyes were agleam, her arching brows were knit.

"Yes!"

"Then go!" she commanded, almost haughtily.

Drawing her golden garment about her, she stood aside to let him pass.

He took a step forward, stopped, and looked at her. How familiar had this face become; every curve and contour, every line and feature, the wide and level brows, the steady, shining gaze, the strong and tender mouth, the little cleft of the chin; all, all except that glory of dark, cascading hair which he had never seen unbound before, and the ivory column of the throat rising from the cut-out neck of the golden peignoir like a white flower upon a golden stem.

His only friend, his only friend; not now, but in all his life.

Why was he leaving? Where was he going, and why?

He took two steps forward, came close to her, so close that their faces almost touched.

"Eléna!" he said, in a low, choked voice. "Eléna!"

"What have you to say to me? You wished to go. Why do you not go? The way is clear."

"Eléna, it is hard for me to go," he replied humbly.

"Hard to go? You did not find it hard to go without a word, without a thought, without bidding me farewell. If I had had a friend, I should have found that hard, but that is because I have a heart, and you——"

"And I—have none? Is that what you mean?" he cried, in a shaking voice.

"I make no accusations. Actions count, not words."

"You think I have no heart—— *You?*"

"I *thought* you had—you have disappointed me. I would never have believed——"

"Eléna—do you think I do not care—for you?"

"How could I think so when you tried to leave like that?"

"Oh, Eléna!" he cried passionately. "Why can't you love me,—why can't you——?"

A splendor dawned upon her face; her eyes were a revelation.

And then, at last, he knew.

"Eléna!"

And with a strange little cry these two creatures who had suffered alone and together, and who had found that for which most they longed, and which most they needed, flew into one another's arms, and sobbed out all their love and rapture upon each other's heart.

"I have plucked red flowers with sharp thorns," he whispered later, as he gazed down into her radiant face—"and I have found—a white lily upon an altar."





